Expanding Their Horizons: Hermeneutic Practices and Philosophising with Children

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2014

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne

Produced on archival quality paper
Abstract

The influences on the development of Lipman’s Philosophy for Children (P4C), a program that teaches philosophical thinking to students, can be found in the philosophy of the early American pragmatists and the pedagogical model of Socrates. The P4C method sees the teacher guide students through stages of rational thinking towards the resolution of philosophical questions that have been stimulated by the shared experience of a literary text or other artefact. The resolution of these questions takes the form of a defined concept. This approach to problem-based learning is founded on the progressive educational theory of Dewey, and the P4C classroom organisational model is based on the scientific communities valorised by Peirce. By establishing pragmatism’s and Socrates’ influence on P4C, I demonstrate its emphasis on methodical problem solving and conceptual development.

This work critiques and develops the P4C tradition using a hermeneutic framework. Drawing on the work of the hermeneutic philosopher Gadamer, as well as the contemporary pragmatist Rorty, I examine some of the key philosophical and practical assumptions that underpin P4C. I question whether philosophical practice must be oriented towards concept development, and whether philosophy needs to be undertaken using a method as espoused by P4C. I re-situate the literary text as being central to the philosophical community’s discussions, where it is looked to as a potential source of truth, rather than as a stimulus for inquiry. I replace P4C’s commitment to dialogue with Gadamer’s conversation and play, and question whether philosophy must necessarily be seen as an inquiry as such.

The empirical element of this work saw me explore these various ideas with members of my high school English and Literature classes. With these students I enacted the above critiques in order to evaluate their real-world potential. By inhabiting a Gadamerian interpretation of the Socratic figure, I cultivated understandings amongst these students of hermeneutic ideas such as application, fusion of horizons, prejudice and authority. Our philosophical discussions took place in context of text studies, where we engaged in the work of reading and interpreting classic novels.

While maintaining some elements of Lipman’s P4C, my hermeneutic approach demonstrates the value of philosophical thinking that recognises tradition in an encounter with our past. It views philosophising as conversational and aims to develop in students Rorty’s quality of edifying thinkers, rather than Lipman’s conceptual thinkers. I consequently demonstrate the transformative effect of Gadamer’s event of understanding in developing students’ ability to analyse prejudice, cultivate solidarity with others, and exhibit the quality of phronesis.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Jason Pietzner
Acknowledgements

I first wish to acknowledge my parents and their belief in the importance of education, something that was instilled in me from an early age. It is because of this commitment, and their encouragement, that I find myself in the position to submit a Ph.D. thesis. I’m indebted to the students who worked with me in this study, for their thoughtful interpretation, development, and enactment of philosophical hermeneutics. Theirs should be recognised as the most important voices in this work. Finally I thank Associate Professor David Beckett for his unfailing generosity of time and insight, and for the many conversations we had that helped me understand my ideas.
I wish to suggest that the general process of reaching an understanding between persons and the process of understanding per se are both language-events that resemble the inner conversation of the soul with itself, a conversation which Plato asserted was the very essence of thinking.¹

- Hans-Georg Gadamer

Conversation is life, language is the deepest being. We see the patterns repeat, the gestures drive the words. It is the sound and picture of humans communicating. It is talk as a definition of itself. Talk.²

- Don Delillo

He has nothing to distract him, nothing to read. The hospital has no library, offers only old numbers of popular magazine (recipes, hobbies, women's fashions). He complains to Eugenio, who responds by bringing him the textbook from his philosophy course ('I know you are a serious person'). The book is, as he feared, about tables and chairs. He lays it aside. 'I'm sorry, it's not my kind of philosophy.'

'What kind of philosophy would you like instead?' asks Eugenio.

'The kind that shakes one. That changes one's life.'³

- J.M. Coetzee

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# ABSTRACT

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter One: Introduction

Thoughtfulness and Reflection

Some years ago, at a conference for teachers, I was present at a forum in which the aims of education were discussed. Amongst the usual stock replies came one that had a particular resonance. One member of the panel, in the simplest response to the question, said that our purpose as educators was to develop thoughtful citizens. This answer to the question has influenced some of my work since that day. Certainly the aims of education necessarily involve more than this, but the quality of ‘thoughtfulness’ seems to me to be the most important of dispositions, both for individual efficacy and societal value. But while it is a worthwhile aim to be individually efficacious, the possibility exists that an individual might be so, yet do no good for society as whole. Such a person may even do society some harm in the process of achieving personal goals. The idea of societal value then, in the contribution a good citizen might make to the common good, has equal, if not greater, importance for me. I believe that as citizens, and educators, teachers have a duty to maintain a fair and decent society through the values and beliefs we instil in our students, so that they might take their place in society and contribute meaningfully. The first question that guided this research then was ‘What does it mean to be a thoughtful citizen?’ In considering this question’s key phrase I turned to Aristotle who said

It is a generally accepted view that the perfect good is... not what is sufficient for oneself alone living a solitary life, but something that includes parents, wife and children, friends and fellow citizens in general, for man is by nature a social being.⁴

Leaving aside the essentialist argument that ‘man’ is any particular thing, which will be discussed below, Aristotle suggests that there is a ‘perfect good’ that can be achieved if people live according what is best not for oneself, but for those around them as well, be they a close relative or a distant inhabitant of the same social space. While not convinced that there is any goal or quantity that can account for a perfect good, I was attracted by the general tenor of the claim with its mix of idealism and social imperative. In this work it will become evident how my commitment to the ideal of a thoughtful citizen became important in the program I developed.

A second impetus for thinking about this question came from the work of Richard Rorty, a twentieth century pragmatic philosopher (or post-philosopher as he describes himself)

who spent the latter part of his career thinking and writing about questions similar to mine. His first response to Aristotle’s ‘man as natural social being’ argument is clear:

Our [that is anti-metaphysical philosophers’] insistence on contingency, and our consequent opposition to ideas like “essence” “nature,” and “foundation,” makes it impossible for us to retain the notion that some actions and attitudes are naturally “inhuman.”

So for Rorty’s ethics of citizenship there is no such thing as a ‘human nature’ that we can turn to in order to condemn an action, or to make general moral judgments about the correct way to live, or to be a good citizen. Aristotle’s argument, in relying on man’s nature, cannot be sustained in our postmodern age, and Rorty recognizes this by talking of our ‘contingency’ and lack of ‘essence’. Rorty however does have a good at which he thinks citizens must aim, but which also accounts for shifts in language and culture, and he seems to avoid appealing to a human essence for its validity. He instead asks the question ‘What can there be except human solidarity [my italics], our recognition of one another's common humanity?’ He finds his answer in the belief that the good lies in people constructing understandings that seek, not to dissolve difference, but to recognise that, ‘...feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a function of a historically contingent final vocabulary.’ Rorty’s appeal then is for people to find solidarity through a shared discourse that is not only used together but also constructed together, through communicative acts that seek to develop understanding and empathy in tolerant recognition of others. Seen in this way Aristotle’s good, one that is not sufficient for a solitary life, and Rorty’s good, that of solidarity amongst people, seem to have something in common with each other, despite their metaphysical differences. For me the thoughtful citizen is one that meets the demands of both of these accounts.

The second of my questions was ‘What does it mean to be a reflective person?’ As a professional it has always seemed self evident that my skills would develop if I thought about my work and made appropriate changes based on this reflection. Who can avoid thinking about the day just spent working, or the class one has just taught, and not consider its good and bad aspects and implement improvements for the future. It seems that this type of reflection is a necessary and inevitable part of good practice. As both a primary and secondary teacher however I had found that, while the quality of reflection was also encouraged in students, the quality itself seemed to have many meanings accorded it. At a certain point it became difficult for me know what curriculum documents in fact meant when they demanded

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 192.
that, for example, students should be ‘...provided with sufficient time to think, reflect, and engage in sustained discussion, deliberation and inquiry’ or that they ‘...learn to reflect on what they know and develop awareness that there is more to know.’8 In the first example, reflection seems to be a process separate to thinking and engaging, perhaps one that takes place after the thinking and before the engaging. In the second example it appears to be a sort of remembering what you already know, so that you can then take steps in order develop your knowledge and fill in the spaces with new learning. If we work these usages together it seems that ‘reflection’ might refer to an undemanding process of cognitive mirror-gazing and recall, without any inherent process of critique or analysis attached. But while the word itself, and its usage above, seem to suggest just such a thing, I am confident that this meaning is not what the authors intended.

Despite these apparent difficulties I can be sure of those moments when I have been struck by acts of genuine reflection. Such occasions have presented themselves to me in various ways. I have seen such moments in people, I have experienced my own reflectivity, and I have read personal accounts in which acts of reflection have been communicated with such vividness that they have rung true. Socrates, in his speech to the Athenian court in which he defends himself on charges of impiety and corrupting the young, says:

The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless... That is why I still go about seeking and searching... 9

This statement has long struck me with its element of humility and reflectivity. Perhaps Socrates is being ironic in the apparent exhibition of these qualities, but the statement is sincere in its attempt to portray his own questing for knowledge as one that is motivated in part by uncertainty and self-doubt. Socrates’ wisdom in fact lies in the belief that he acknowledges that there are many things he does not know, and that still require further investigation. As impressive as his wisdom might have appeared to the people of Athens, Socrates himself still sought and searched, and his ability to consider the fact of his own incomplete knowledge provides an example of one facet of the reflective thinker. I have not failed to note that this well-known story continues to have resonance today, and that the curriculum document referred to above may well be referring to this lesson when it recommends that students ‘reflect’ on what they do not know.

My second example of reflection is perhaps the more significant for my work and its aims. Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past begins with a single sensation that inspired a

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million word reflection on his life, memories and philosophy. On eating a morsel of madeleine cake dipped in tea Proust feels ‘a shudder run through [him]’\(^{10}\), a feeling that dissipates until he locks himself away and again recreates ‘this unremembered state’\(^{11}\) by clearing his mind of all other thoughts, so as to concentrate on the recreation of the taste sense he had just experienced. Tiring of the effort, Proust describes how he rests his mind for a moment, gathering strength for a final effort at finding the sensation and the hazy memories and images related to the taste in his recollection. Finally the memory reveals itself to him, one that had been locked away and forgotten for many years. It is his aunt Leonie allowing him a small taste of her madeleine cake and tea on Sunday mornings before the young Proust went to church. Around this memory ‘immediately rose the old grey house on the street, where her room was, [which] rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening up onto the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents,’\(^{12}\) and so on to a chain of countless other memories that were made vivid by the strength of Proust’s ability to remember. In this anecdote it is Proust’s multi-sensory approach to thinking, his ability to control and concentrate his own thoughts, and the elegant and detailed putting into language of this moment that particularly attract me to this example of reflection.

But while literary anecdotes are not empirically based arguments, nor even claims to first hand witness, they nevertheless can create a resonances that communicate particular instances of insight about experiences we all have when living in the world. As Warnock writes, ‘[t]he point of these descriptions is not merely to illustrate a concept... [but] rather that we should understand the nature of the phenomenon by accepting the truthfulness of the story.’\(^{13}\) If the story seems true then the idea it illustrates might be as well, and our understanding of our personal experience is further illuminated. Many writers and philosophers use anecdotes or stories to illustrate their thinking, and I have been particularly influenced in my nascent ideas about philosophical practices by the stories that illustrate to me both aspects of the reflective process and that inspire the same.

At this stage I have presented two related questions; ‘What makes for a thoughtful citizen?’ and ‘What is reflection?’ along with philosophical and literary texts that attempt to justify an answer to the former and illustrate an example of the latter. The relationship between these two questions is significant as they suggest different cognitive and affective processes, as well as interior and exterior orientations. I take the question about thoughtful

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{13}\) M. Warnock, introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Routledge 2005), XV.
citizenry as one that is primarily affective and directed towards those other people in the world whose wellbeing should be our concern. Certainly ‘thoughtful’ includes the intellectual process of mulling over one’s ideas and considering them in new light. I am more interested though in its implied imperative that a good citizen is one that thinks about others, and includes them and their state of being in any conception of a world that is fair and right. When I posit the question about ‘reflection’ I consider its suggested referencing of a mirror or self-image and see it as entailing a ‘turning back of one’s thoughts’ in an attempt to understand and critique them, or even to grasp a precursor of these ideas in order to reformulate and refine them. I am not suggesting that this all happens in a purely cognitive domain that is absent of emotional content or intersubjective intent. The two questions together present two elements of thinking and being that I believe are important to develop in students, and present a goal at which education can direct its energies.

**Philosophy for Children**

I have long been a practitioner and advocate of Philosophy for Children (P4C), first developed by Matthew Lipman and his colleagues and introduced through their book *Philosophy in the Classroom*\(^ {14}\). For me it seemed the pedagogical answer to the teaching of thoughtfulness and reflection. In his introduction to the book Lipman justified his program by stating that ‘instruction in the procedures of reasoning can be very helpful in developing the art of thinking,’\(^ {15}\) and I too believed that reflection and thoughtfulness was the practice and art of reasoned thinking. Lipman, an American professor of philosophy, developed a program that required the reading of an ordered selection of stories (written by himself) that were based on classical philosophical ideas and figures. A second seminal figure in the P4C program, via his frequently acknowledged influence on Lipman, is the American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, a leading figure in the progressive education movement in the first part of the twentieth century. Well known for his child-centred and constructivist approach to educational innovation, Dewey saw the child not as a vessel for facts but as an active inquirer and problem solver. He believed that instruction in thinking was critical to his educational program and that ‘…only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his way out, does he [the student] think.’\(^ {16}\) Dewey, who was much influenced by scientific progress and achievement, further said in this regard that ‘…we may speak, without error, of

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., 4.

the method of thought [and that] the essentials of method are therefore identical with the essentials of reflection." So for Dewey and Lipman both, thinking and reflection should be both rational and methodical, and take place as the activity of the inquiring child. Since its initial development, P4C has evolved into practices that do not necessarily require the original stories and course notes, but as I will show it is one that is still very much informed by Lipman’s original work and Dewey’s educational philosophy. Early in my teaching career I attended several courses presented by P4C practitioners and organisations, and completed university subjects in which the P4C course was either explicitly taught or used as the primary pedagogy. I began the implementation of P4C in what then was then my primary school classroom from what I can describe as an informed position.

The practices I implemented in the classroom were rewarding and successful. P4C, since its introduction, has undergone some development but at its core is the belief that children are naturally curious about the world and they learn best when teachers allow students to construct their own understanding of this world around their own questions. In its standard practice, a circle of students are presented with an artefact of some sort (a story, a picture, an object etc.) around which a brief exploratory discussion takes place. Students then develop their own questions of a philosophical nature based on the stimulus of the artefact, after which they decide upon a single question that becomes the subject of discussion. Students share their thinking, challenge each other’s beliefs, and develop answers that satisfy the reasoned analysis of the group. The teacher’s role is that of the dialogue’s facilitator, ensuring that the students to do the thinking work. Teachers are present to probe students’ understanding and test inconsistencies in thinking. Their input is guided by questions of a Socratic nature, and the students see themselves as being part of a community of inquiry whose goal is the development of conceptual understanding. Teachers should, as much as possible, confine their role to keeping the discussion on track and ensuring that the inquiring community functions correctly. The best sessions are those where the teacher’s voice is only occasionally heard.

The quality of discussion P4C practice encouraged in my students surprised me from very early on in my implementation. They were interested in questions of a philosophical nature and our sessions would last for some time, as the students wanted opportunities to share their thoughts and challenge the thoughts of their peers. The benefits that derive from P4C, while often qualified by the requirement for quality teacher professional development

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17 Ibid., 192.
and sustained practice, are well documented. Trickey and Topping\(^{18}\) in their review of controlled outcomes studies described studies that found a range of measurable benefits including improved logical reasoning, reading comprehension, mathematics ability, self esteem and turn taking during discussion. They found as well that studies that satisfied their methodological standards in terms of pre-post measurement and control group comparison all reported a positive effect size with a mean of 0.425, one that is ‘usually described as moderate and certainly of educational significance’. \(^{19}\) Barry, King and Burke\(^{20}\) in their analysis of student talk during P4C sessions, reported several positive outcomes including increased higher cognitive level talk (task enhancing, metacognitive and student questioning), positive attitudes towards philosophy and enhanced interpersonal connections. Daniel et al\(^{21}\) in a study that examined student P4C transcripts from three different countries described a range of high order thinking skills evidenced in the talk of the students. They found students were more likely to think creatively, logically, responsibly (ethically) and metacognitively when engaged in conversation structured around P4C principles. They also found evidence of epistemological development, in terms of a movement from egocentric sense based claims to inter-subjective meaning making statements, after long term (one year) critical dialogic talk.

My enthusiasm for P4C was due to the fact that I saw these benefits in my own students’ discussions. I had never experienced young children talking in such complex ways before I began using P4C, and I would not have suspected that children would be interested in philosophical ideas and problems. A few years later after these experiences, having an interest in teaching older students, I changed jobs and moved to a high school. After teaching the upper years of primary school for several years I found myself teaching a range of subjects to year eight and nine students. I quickly began employing P4C in my classes as I felt it was the most important of my pedagogical tools. In my primary school classrooms of the preceding few years I had experienced considerable success in cultivating the creative and inquiring students that P4C practitioners agree is possible, and I was eager to try it in a new setting. Comparing teaching in a primary school with teaching in a high school is paradoxical. I can say that in many ways there is practically no difference at all, but just as easily say, in critical ways, there is all the difference in the world. Much of what I had I’d heard about adolescents was true;


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 375.

\(^{20}\) K. Barry, King, L., Burke, M., "Student Talk in a Whole Class and Cooperative Learning Setting in a Philosophy for Children Program" (paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Sydney, 4-7 December 2000).

they could be difficult and easy going, defiant and cooperative, thoughtful and thoughtless and generally protean in their moods and nature. Discipline was different as they didn’t necessarily care whether they were well behaved or not, and the natural inclination to learn, so manifest in my primary school students, seemed overwhelmed by their obsession with peers, friends and the need for acceptance. While one often hears that adolescents have these characteristics, trying to teach around them, or despite them, is a difficult task.

**Rationale**

This rupture in experience meant that I soon began to question P4C’s applicability in a classroom of adolescents. A straight transferal of the structure into an adolescent classroom was not effective. Many of the qualities that I had taken for granted previously in my primary students; their innate desire to learn and succeed, their willingness to listen and question beliefs (including their own), and their risk taking with ideas were not apparent my high school classes. These students were frequently dismissive of each other and their ideas, largely disinterested in sharing thoughts, and had great difficulty in having a conversation in which people were listened to and ideas exchanged. The list of rules that I had used in the primary setting that prescribed the correct structure and behaviours of a philosophical discussion were ineffective, as the older students resisted them. I then reminded myself of the original purpose of P4C in my own practice, which was to develop the quality of *reflection and thoughtfulness* in my students. It was obvious to me that my students were not being reflective in their talk, but in particular they seemed more concerned with reaching the goal of a defined concept by winning an argument. It was at this point I began to re-visit the ideals of reflectivity I had in mind, and I realised that the talk of my students fell far short of the standards set by the Proust and Socrates. Based on those examples, good thinking could be described as thinking that acknowledges uncertainty and doubt, requires good reasoning, is based on personal experience, is metacognitive and is capable of clear linguistic expression and creativity. At its best I believed such thinking should result in a greater understanding of the self and world, provide some moral guidance, and always emphasise the importance of respect and tolerance towards others. A further examination of the above anecdotes however, with Proust’s being the most vivid, provides the presentation of a further quality that I am able to articulate only partly. For now I will say it is an awareness of and sensitivity to consciousness and the manner in which the world constructs and presents itself to the subject. While I did not expect my teenage students to match the wisdom and insight of Proust and Socrates, I did believe that they were capable of emulating the structures of reflective thoughtfulness they exemplified. I believed that all of my students, to a greater or lesser degree, were capable of each of these
things, but were rarely demonstrating them consistently or to any significant degree. I saw the essence of their problem as lying in an unwillingness to acknowledge uncertainty and a need to be seen as correct rather than curious. This resulted in the student talk being argumentative rather than exploratory, and their thinking being, as Daniel et al. classify it, relativistic rather than intersubjective. I also believed that the students had little insight into themselves or the way their thoughts were constructed and developed.

A Problematisation of P4C
Hoyrup writes that professional reflection is initiated ‘[w]hen something does not accord with expectations, when we are surprised...’ The discordance I experienced in the new school setting with older students led me to question the P4C paradigm. In researching this discordance I found other writers who both shared many of my concerns, and suggested further criticisms I hadn’t considered. The first question I had of P4C was in fact one of myself. I am not a philosopher, and I have had no education in philosophy other than the P4C program itself. While this training was pedagogically sound, it had not in fact taught me any of the philosophical tradition. My subject expertise is as a primary school generalist teacher and high school English teacher. As Brenifer reminded me, ‘...the program is of a philosophical nature, but many of the practitioners do not have a philosophical culture’.

I had heard of Socrates and Nietzsche but I had little knowledge about their thought, other than a few ideas I had picked up here and there. In reading Lipman’s materials it is obvious that they are informed by and rely on a rich vein of philosophical knowledge—one that I had no formal access too. I doubted that I could really be said to be teaching philosophy, and instead came to see that what I was doing in fact was mediating a thoughtful conversation between my students, something that can be considered philosophical in one sense but not at the deeper philosophical level that I wanted to achieve. My practice was uninformed and my classes were without substantial philosophical input or classical ideas in any form.

Brenifer, in his observation of a P4C conference, observes other problems with the Lipman program and its derivatives. Many of his critical comments could just as well apply to my P4C practice and the classrooms of other teachers who ‘do philosophy’. He was troubled by the practice of students sitting in circles (or communities of inquiry) while they had discussions. In such settings he believed that ‘powerful arguments ... go unnoticed [in the]

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22 Ibid.
junkyard of words25 as there were simply too many students to allow considered and rigorous discussion of each contributor’s ideas; something particularly problematic given the constraints of timetables in schools. Another potential problem that the circles may encourage is ‘...the pressure any group exerts on the individual to accept majority thinking.’26 While any teacher would defend and promote the right of students to hold individual opinions, it is not possible to say that students are not intimidated by the idea of presenting a contrary point of view to a group of peers who are arguing against it. I believe that this would be particularly so in an adolescent classroom—not every one can be as resolute and independent in their beliefs as Socrates was famous for being! There seemed to be some issues of power and control amongst students as well as in the role of the teacher that were not being addressed. Bleazby wonders, as I did, what became of the discussion generated in a P4C session after it was completed. She notes that the pragmatic philosophy of Dewey, which informs so much of P4C theory, emphasises the importance of practical experience and action. P4C however, with its emphasis on dialogue in classroom settings, ‘...doesn’t facilitate practicality, and this is a serious problem for any pedagogy.’27 It seemed difficult to gauge the success or otherwise of a learning activity when there was nothing to see or touch or read, and so the practical outcome of the discussions seemed uncertain.

My most substantial criticism of the P4C program came to be one however that lies in its epistemological basis and pedagogical practice. The type of thinking privileged in the teaching materials developed by P4C educators, with few exceptions, is that belonging to the classical and pragmatist traditions. This type of thinking is commonly described in literature as evidence based, logical, rational, reasoned, and problem-oriented. Similarly, the skills P4C is said to develop are those of the rational, critical, reasoned thinker who is collegiate rather than egocentric. While these thinking and personal qualities can have benefits, and are appropriate in many situations, their instrumental basis, and practices founded on scientific communities, neglect other significant traditions, particularly those in the critical and continental tradition. Theorists working within these domains have much to critique when addressing P4C practice. Vansieleghem surmises ‘...that Philosophy for Children has a political agenda and functions as a vehicle to develop that agenda as well,’28 an agenda which mandates particular qualities and behaviours in children as well as specific thinking styles, without reference to the children themselves. Brenfer observes the collective and pragmatic

25 Ibid., 121.
26 Ibid., 126.
emphasis of P4C at the expense of a personal or subjective truth, one that is important as ‘[t]he primary form of this truth is authenticity, the characteristic of a person that is true.’

And Burgh, in his examination of feminist critiques of P4C finds that ‘...the construction and use of reason and rationality, especially in the western philosophical tradition, has silenced, in particular, women’s voices.’ With these criticisms in mind it is apparent that some of the universal precepts in the development of P4C practice deserve further examination and critique. And while they observe different aspects of P4C thought, these criticisms are similar in that they question some fundamental qualities of P4C that are otherwise seen as positive and beneficial to the child and society.

I have said, in beginning this work, and as I have found since, that I am not alone in both admiring and criticising some elements of P4C. Vansieleghem, in recognising a general shift in thinking about the field, writes

Now philosophy for children becomes philosophy with children. The change in the preposition is an important index of difference: it betokens a still greater emphasis on dialogue as fundamental and indispensable to the pedagogy of philosophy, which is no longer understood as the modelling and coaching of an ideal of analytical reason, but as what generates communal reflection, contemplation and communication. In this respect, the second generation will no longer speak about philosophy for or with children in terms of a method, but rather as a movement encompassing a medley of approaches, each with its own methods, techniques and strategies.

In this regard I put myself forward as a member of the second generation of P4C practitioners who similarly emphasise communal reflection without method. Philosophy for Children locates its practices within Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy and Socrates’ elenchus. Its hybrid aim is the rational development of concepts that have practical value in solving encountered problems. This thesis argues though that the Dewey—Socrates nexus results in a model of philosophical inquiry that privileges discursive thinking and naturalises the human subject, something that can leave aspects of human experience and understanding unacknowledged, or misunderstood. While acknowledging the value of some elements of classic pragmatic philosophy, I draw on the work of the contemporary pragmatist Richard Rorty, and, by his recommendation, the hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, in proposing a model of philosophical discussion that sees the lifeworld of the student in a richer relief than that which Dewey’s naturalised environment and Lipman’s inquiring communities allows. For Gadamer ‘...understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it

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chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding.\textsuperscript{32} Hermeneutics in this way allows us to see human subjectivity as one that is \textit{linguistic and historically created}, and emphasises human’s ability to understand as a result of this enculturation in manner very different to Dewey’s organic and object oriented subject. Hermeneutic practice enables us to reflect on some fundamental claims about people, and their understandings of the world, that illuminate certain conditions of being that pragmatism cannot account for. And finally, hermeneutics sees philosophy not as inquiry but as an ongoing discussion with tradition, and other people, that both expands the philosophical community’s boundaries, as well as the practical wisdom of the community’s members.

Research Questions
This research is bounded by a series of questions that mark out its philosophical and practical terrain. In establishing and ordering these questions I am both indicating my research interests and developing a map of the interrelated elements of investigation in my work. The overarching question that I seek to answer is:

1. How does a hermeneutic critique of Philosophy for Children reconceptualise the philosophical practice of young people?

In this work I am not looking to map existing practices against a hermeneutic schema but, given this is a \textit{practical and critical} study, generate a new mode of philosophising that, while acknowledging the Lipman program, develops a way that students work with each other, and introduces new imperatives such as \textit{tradition} and \textit{phronesis} into philosophical discourse.

In answering this question I will also answer three sub-questions:

a. What are the philosophical and pedagogical elements immanent in P4C materials and practice?

I will establish P4C as an established and recognisable practice with a literature and tradition that marks it as such. This tradition has as its basis a particular range of philosophical precedents and commitments that are readily identifiable through an analysis of primary and secondary source materials.

b. What does a hermeneutic evaluation of these elements recommend for P4C?

Using hermeneutic theory, in particular its rejection of method and its concept of effective history, I will criticise elements of pragmatism and P4C practice. In doing so I will endorse the ‘conversation with tradition’ as better suited to student philosophising.

c. What intellectual and personal qualities are developed in students and teachers in a Hermeneutics with Children?

I will finally recognise and discuss a selection of qualities that are both developed in students and revealed through a practice of philosophy that is distinct from P4C. In particular I will posit the benefits of phronesis and solidarity as distinct virtues that emerge through hermeneutic practices.

Fieldwork Design

This research is based on an analysis of student work that resulted from two of my classes over a period of fourteen months. The first was a year ten English class in which students gave me permission to record and transcribe our conversations, as well as collect samples of their writing. This was a generalist English class, in which I integrated weekly philosophy sessions along with other standard activities and tasks. The student work was collected over a period of two school terms (twenty weeks). The second class was a year eleven literature class, held early the following year, in which students gave me permission to collect transcripts of conversations and writing samples. Philosophy sessions took place once a week in this class as well, and the work samples were collected over a period of one school term (ten weeks). All work samples were analysed using qualitative methods, and I explicitly positioned myself as using a hermeneutic and critical research paradigm. From this position I interpreted the work samples based on hermeneutic values, the first of which is that human understanding is linguistic and situated, and that these qualities lend such understanding an authenticity not available using the methods of natural science. Descriptive categories were drawn from philosophical hermeneutics, and used to highlight elements of student philosophical understanding and practices as revealed in their work. Using thick descriptive language and in-depth discussion, I explored each of these student practices according to appropriate hermeneutic concepts.
Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters, of which this introduction is the first. Here I have mapped out the scope of my research and introduced the main ideas and direction of my investigations. The second chapter forms the literature review and can be divided into three parts. Part one outlines the historical development of Lipman’s P4C and describes its pedagogical principles and practice. Part two unpacks the philosophical principles of Lipman’s program. In particular I examine the influence of Dewey and early American pragmatism, with its emphasis on method and inquiring communities as founded on scientific practices. An examination of the Socratic method of philosophical inquiry is also undertaken. Part three explores the rise and development of philosophical hermeneutics, in particular the work of Gadamer. I draw on the connections between his work and that of the contemporary pragmatist Rorty, and make recommendations for a hermeneutic appraisal of P4C based on this linkage of ideas. In the third chapter I explain my methodological paradigms and place them within a qualitative and hermeneutic context. My human ethics acquittal and audit trail are also detailed, as well as the timeline of my data collection process. The fourth chapter is the most substantial, and it is where I undertake the descriptive analysis of the collected student work samples. Using hermeneutic practices and principles as my analytical framework, I discuss the work and demonstrate evidence of intellectual and personal qualities that emerge from hermeneutic practices. In the fifth chapter I return to my research questions and briefly summarising my findings. I then conclude by making some observations about the broader implications of my work, both for philosophy in schools and the purposes of education more generally.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Two Investigations

In the early seventies an academic philosopher, Matthew Lipman, despaired at the quality of thinking he was seeing in his undergraduate students. They were reasonably knowledgeable and able to remember and recall facts, but their ability to think critically was limited. While the definitions of ‘critical thinking’ vary widely, Lipman aligned criticality with rationality; the ability to correctly develop conclusions from premises, and creativity; the ability to innovate in the production of solutions to problematic situations. Lipman’s later work expanded on this conception considerably and he came to see that his program, which he called Philosophy for Children, should also develop the ability in students to make good judgments. Lipman’s early work, with the assistance of some key colleagues, gradually generated an enthusiastic following, first in America, and then in many other countries around the world, and an identifiable P4C movement developed. On beginning this research, as I have noted, I would have certainly described myself as a P4C practitioner, but my experience gradually brought about a shift in thinking. I became critical of the reduction of philosophical inquiry to concept development, the role of Socratic techniques in privileging rationality and encouraging teacher-centeredness in communities of inquiry, and the use of deliberately constructed and (in my opinion) unchallenging narrative texts. As an English teacher I also wondered about the role of philosophy in the English classroom, and I began to question the philosophies on which P4C was based, as well as the seeming absence of reference to continental philosophers in P4C materials (about which I had some elementary knowledge).

The first investigation I undertook was into the philosophy of P4C and its effect on practice. Lipman, in the creation and development of P4C, relied on a small range of philosophers and theorists as his inspirations and theoretical guides. In reading both his works, and the work of those that were motivated by Lipman’s programs, these philosophers are referred to both regularly and, I think, uncritically. Dewey is certainly the paramount influence on Lipman’s work, both as a philosopher and school reformer, and he is the most referenced philosopher by Lipman and other P4C writers. Peirce is also a significant figure, both through a direct influence on Lipman, as well as via his secondary influence on Dewey. Both of these philosophers were seminal in the development of early American pragmatism, and their thinking on science, inquiry, communities, and education more broadly is evident in Lipman’s work. Lipman also presented the dialogical method of Socrates, the third significant influence, as paradigmatic of the correct way to teach philosophy. I will discuss each of these figures in
detail below but first a brief description of American pragmatism is required, as it underpins so much of Lipman’s thought, as well as the thinking of those whom he influenced. Pragmatism takes its basic orientation from the natural sciences, and entails a series of commitments that humans should apply in their everyday dealings with the world. In particular these commitments are epistemological and methodical; both in what one can have knowledge of and how one can go about developing this knowledge. Along with this, pragmatists add a humanistic element that is missing in science.

Lipman takes his conception of ‘the community of inquiry’ (CoI) largely from the work of C.S. Peirce. His particular interest was the strength of the community within which scientific experimentation and progress took place. What Peirce says of community is frequently reflected in Lipman’s conception of the same. He, too, sees philosophical inquiry as best undertaken in a community, which, with careful guidance, replicates qualities much the same as those of Peirce’s scientific communities. From Dewey, Lipman takes his ideas on progressive education, as well as Dewey’s belief that education should be a constructivist process of inquiring into problematic situations. Dewey is well known as an early advocate of progressive education; a set of principles developed as a response to the traditional education systems which were prevalent at the time. Dewey was also an exemplary humanist. He was little interested in abstract or academic philosophies and always examined problems and their solutions in terms of their instrumental effect on life. Finally, in Socrates, Lipman sees the ideal of both a philosopher and teacher of philosophy. Socrates is the ideal philosopher in that he believed that there was a truth to be found, though it was always elusive and difficult to grasp. Socrates is the ideal teacher because his method was constructivist. Such principles naturally accord well with the educational progressivism Lipman absorbed from Dewey. Lipman also introduces narrative fiction as being a material around which philosophical inquiry takes place. This conflation of Lipman’s desire for a philosophical practice in schools, and the influence of the three key thinkers in Peirce, Dewey and Socrates, led to the development of P4C as having a particular method and product. The purpose of the teacher is to lead the community of inquiry through each step in a procedure so that the students move from conceptual confusion towards conceptual clarity. This movement is conducted by way of Socratic questioning that develops agreement by consensus.

I will leave the above to one side for the moment and describe a concurrent investigation I undertook, which was into the absence of continental philosophy in P4C materials. A substantial portion of this tradition was founded on phenomenology, in particular the work of Husserl, and significant elements of continental philosophy that followed his work
were a development of, or response to, Husserl’s investigations of consciousness. For Husserl, consciousness was the locus of all experience and he sought to describe in accurate detail its workings in the creation of this experience. This he saw as the most fundamental task of philosophy, and he believed phenomenology to be the first science, not the natural sciences as had been assumed up until then. Heidegger, while rejecting many aspects of his teacher Husserl’s work, further developed some elements that included the life-world as the pre-theoretical experience from which concepts such as science emerged. From this arose Heidegger’s larger project of an analysis of Dasein, about which he demands that there are certain ineluctable facts—Dasein’s facticity. In this Heidegger was influenced by the project of hermeneutics, in particular the work of Dilthey (who was greatly influenced by Husserl’s work), and his insistence on culture, history and experience being essential to the way that humans interpret the world. Gadamer, on whom Heidegger’s work on hermeneutics was enormously influential, developed a larger scheme of work which he called hermeneutic philosophy. As such it was an account of the way that human beings understand their world, and also a normative account of what he believed was correct understanding. He took as his first principles Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein, along with Dilthey’s hermeneutics and Husserl’s life-world, and developed a way of orienting oneself towards, and working with, classic texts. His work presents a collection of principles that can be applied to understanding. I became particularly interested in Gadamer’s work as so much of it integrated the reading and interpretation of traditional texts—a useful element for an English teacher.

Now I will draw the two strands of this investigation together; the investigation into P4C, and the investigation into hermeneutics. I believe that philosophical hermeneutics, when brought to dialogue with P4C, has some constructive observations to make about P4C’s assumptions and practices. My hermeneutic critique will look at several at elements of P4C; its reliance on method as philosophical inquiry, its use of the text, its definition of philosophy as concept development, its constraints on community, and its construction of dialogue. The parallels between the scientific method and the method of P4C are clear. It traces similar steps to the scientific methods and procedures that take place in scientific communities, and it also shares some of the same language of those communities. Implicit in this method are some assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, and even truth. The problematic constraints on community and use of the text in P4C deserve consideration as well. For P4C the community of inquiry stops at the classroom door. It is amongst the students and teachers themselves that the dialogue takes place, and it is incumbent on these community members to do all the thinking on a subject. This neglects the role of history and culture in self-
development and understanding, as well as ignores as what Gadamer saw as the potential truth value to be found in classical texts. Dialogue in P4C also maintains a strong relationship to the model presented by Socrates, in that it is rational, teacher-centered, and methodical in that it consists of a series of intentional moves that are product oriented. Gadamer also looks to Plato’s Socrates for his model of dialogue, and in this there is some concurrence with P4C, but his emphasis is substantially different. Gadamer, in theorising discussion as a form of ‘play,’ opposes P4C’s interpretation of the Socratic method. In re-describing Socrates’ art of questioning, he writes ‘[t]here is no such thing as a method for asking questions…’ Finally, hermeneutics questions whether philosophy is only and always concept development. Once again is it certain there is some agreement between P4C and Gadamer, who agrees with Lipman that the examination of concepts is an appropriate practice, but for him philosophy does not stop with the concept. I will look to what Rorty describes as edifying discourse, or a conversation that keeps going, as a response to this traditional conception of philosophy. In doing so I will finally show that Rorty in fact finds a series of resonances between pragmatism and hermeneutics that can be applied to a new philosophical practice.

In the below sections I will first outline the P4C program and identify its philosophical precedents. I will then shift to a discussion of hermeneutic philosophy, trace its historical development with a particular emphasis on the work of Gadamer, and finally develop a hermeneutic critique of P4C by way of the contemporary pragmatist Rorty, who found in Gadamer a useful mode of philosophising that turned away from method towards the goal of edification.

**Philosophy for Children**

Matthew Lipman and his colleagues at Montclair State University are well regarded as those who first developed a coherent and formal program of philosophy instruction designed for students in the primary and secondary years of schooling. It is Lipman, however, who is viewed as the figurehead of the Philosophy for Children movement that developed as a result of their work. Such was, and continues to be, the influence of his seminal program and publications that they have been an ongoing influence in many of the corollary programs, publications and beliefs that they engendered, and aspects of their influence can be found in most P4C materials available. Preceding Lipman’s work, however, Vansieleghem finds that

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33 Ibid., 359.
35 The following summary of P4C, along with a selection of journal articles, is derived from a survey of these works: Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia:
‘Philosophy for children originate[d] in the reaction Progressivists gave on the excesses of the encyclopedic ‘learning’ school’ and on the marginal position of the child at the end of the 19th century.36 Traditionalism, the then dominant model of school organisation and pedagogy, was the antithesis of Progressivism. It demanded that subjects be taught in discrete units and be divided into traditional disciplines with independent curriculums and learning standards. Students were seen as tabulae rasa; blank slates without relevant or necessary pre-knowledge or interests that required acknowledgment by the school system. Inspired by behaviourism, students were expected to remember facts and supply these when required, which was regarded as an indication of learning, and they were graded according to normative standards as measured by results in tests. A major critic of the traditional model of education, the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, couched the argument between the two competing thoughts as that between a model that ‘...is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside... in which the attitude of pupils must, on the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience’ versus one that cultivates individuality, the development of knowledge through experience and an appropriate preparation for a dynamic future.37 Lipman, highly influenced by Dewey, saw the P4C program as a source of school improvement along these Deweyan precepts.

The first major exposition of the P4C program is to be found in Philosophy in the Classroom, written in 1977 by Lipman and two colleagues; Ann Sharp and Frederick Oscanyan. A second edition of Philosophy in the Classroom38 was published in 1980. In this book Lipman et al. describe an agenda for school redesign which very much accords with progressive thinking. While recognising that efforts were being made to ensure that a wider cohort of students experience success, they believed the emphasis on rote learning and the use of normative curriculums required that students be coerced into learning. Lipman et al. countered that ‘[i]f the educational process had relevance, interest and meaning for the children there would be no need make them learn.’39 Echoing the progressive model of learning, they claimed that it was in fact impossible to give meaning of anything to anyone and

38 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom.
39 Ibid., 5.
that children will engage wilfully and enthusiastically if the school is structured in such a way that it represents knowledge in meaningful ways. Lipman et al. viewed education not as the transmission of facts, but as the development of understanding by the student; one that is constructed by the student with the assistance of the teacher. They argued that children from a young age were capable of pondering and discussing philosophical concepts, that such activity was best able to respond to the challenges he set for education, and that this being the case teachers should ‘...involve children in a philosophical conversation from the beginning.’

P4C began as a progressivist program that sought to remediate education, and which presented integrated knowledge, the community of inquiry, and the explicit teaching of thinking skills as solutions. Lipman further advanced his project of P4C through the publication in 1991 of his book Thinking in Education—which was revised substantially for a 2003 edition (on which I will be concentrating). In the introduction he first acknowledged that the teaching of thinking, an element entirely absent in schools before the mid 1970s (a period that predates his first publications), was now being widely discussed as something that should be seen as valuable and essential in contemporary education. Lipman made the claim that ‘...the capacity of philosophy, when properly reconstructed and properly taught, [can] bring about significant improvement of thinking in education [Lipman’s italics].’ Further to this Lipman presents the community of inquiry as the pedagogical element that should be used in the instruction of thinking, irrespective of the qualitative nature or the type of critical thinking being taught. This, along with his three-part model of good thinking, the centrality of conceptual development, and the use of literature in P4C classrooms, are the essential elements of the Lipman program. I turn to each of these now.

Critical, Creative and Caring Thinking

Key in this latter work (Lipman 2003) is the three-part model Lipman developed that encompassed the thinking types he believed most important. A summary of this, combined with some observations from his earlier publications, works towards establishing a clear model of the explicit thinking aims of the P4C program.

Critical Thinking

In Lipman et al.’s earlier work (Lipman 1991) the emphasis was on the importance of the development of skillful thinking, alone, which they defined as logical thinking:

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41 Lipman, Thinking in Education, 3.
...we possess criteria that enable us to distinguish between skillful and clumsy thinking. These criteria are the principles of logic. By means of such rules we can tell the difference between valid and invalid inferences.42

Through the development of logical thinking skills, a range of other potentials could be realised, from an improvement in reading comprehension to improvements in the ability to find meaningful connections in the world of experience. The development of these abilities meant that children must be schooled explicitly first in the skills of logical thinking. Reasoning explicitly according to logical rules requires more than knowledge of what governs common sense—rather it requires the development of three separate qualities or techniques; formal logic, giving reasons, and acting rationally. Lipman, however, in his own later work, seemed to recognise the inadequacy of these criteria in developing good thinkers. With the emphasis on formal logic and reasoning, the teacher is left with the possibility of developing a logically acute student without any sense of judgment, context, or even the emotional content that is required for sound reasoning. Lipman himself acknowledged that ‘...without the values, without the criteria and norms, without responsibility, you can use the skills [of logic] in a very bad way, as Aristotle showed.’43 This is to say that reasonable systems of thought can be put to bad use when used in support of an individual’s or group’s specific benefit at the expense of another’s with equal rights to benefit. Fisher, borrowing from the work of Paul, uses his distinction between weak (monological) and strong (multilogical) thinking to illuminate this point. The weak thinker thinks ‘...exclusively from one point of view or within one frame of reference' while the strong see ‘...issues from more than one point of view... that is responsive to others and consistent in its intellectual standards.’44 Critical thinking, by this definition, integrates values and a valuing of others as a necessary element of its criteria. A thinking quality that retains its practical goodness in this way is wisdom. Wisdom, with its manifold parts and contextual examinations, does not rely on knowledge alone when developing ideas and solutions. It does not necessarily rely on logic, or explicit rationality, or heuristics or any other algorithmic instruments when applied to a problem. Lipman defines wisdom as the development of good judgments, but recognises that this describes only the outcome of wisdom rather than the process by which good judgments are developed. It is at this point he returns and refreshes his definition of critical thinking. In his later view (2003) critical thinking is that which develops good judgments—the outcome of which is wisdom. From 1991 to 2003 he has shifted his understanding of critical thinking from logical rationality to good judgments.

42 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom, 14.
44 Fisher, Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 30.
Lipman then is left with the task of defining not the outcome of critical thinking, which he has established as good judgments, but the process by which good judgments can be arrived at. He describes critical thinking as being:

1. **Criteria based**, in that reasons can be supplied for a particular judgment. Such reasons rely on external and objective standards that have been established and agreed upon as fair measures and bedrocks of reasonableness.
2. **Self-correcting**, where one aspect of the thinking process is the metacognitive and reflective examination of its own deficiencies.
3. **Sensitive to context**, so that criteria are not applied dogmatically to all situations regardless of the idiosyncrasies of those situations. Elements such as exceptional circumstances, particular limitations and holistic contexts should be accounted for in judgments made.

In support of this definition of critical thinking Lipman, presents examples of critical thinking exemplified by practitioners of law (just as Gadamer uses the law as an exemplary exponent of the application of old laws to unique situations), and medicine. In both contexts practitioners are given considerable flexibility in the application of their knowledge to situations, while adhering to strong models of the structural thinking involved. Lipman makes the point that these reflective exemplars provide the models of critical thinking that should be taught in schools. Critical thinking, in summary, becomes ‘...the process of carefully examining our own thinking and that of others to clarify and improve our understanding of the world’ so that the student can ‘reach judgments’. What was most significant in Lipman’s shift is the idea that thinking is *wordly* and results in *judgments* rather than merely being the product of *logic*.

**Creative Thinking**

Lipman readily acknowledged the importance of creative thinking in philosophical activity. In his definition of creative thinking Lipman offered not a definition of how it can be recognised, or how it can be assessed as ‘good’, but he provides a description of its parts and a method by which one can think creatively. He first compares creative to critical thinking by suggesting that the creative seeks *meaning* rather than *truth* and is self-transcending rather than self correcting. Otherwise the two types have something in common in that they can still rely on criteria with which to make judgments. A further contrast lies in the differences between

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45 Adapted from Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 205-42.
heuristic and algorithmic thinking. Algorithmic thinking is that which follows a set path or an established routine, such as that presented by logic. Heuristic thinking however is ends-based, in that the quality of the thinking is judged purely by its results, irrespective of the means used. This type of thinking is more conducive to creativity in that it frees itself of the restrictions of established rules while the thinker is thoughtfully engaged and productive. The adherence of the thinking subject to rules is likely to develop ideas that are predictable and determined. Heuristic thinking is unbound in its methods and indeterminate in its results.

In his later work (from 2003) however Lipman takes from Peirce the notion of ampliative and explicative reasoning as the signature element of the creative process more broadly, as well as philosophically, and uses it to build on and develop a more comprehensive model of creativity. Explicative reasoning extends on the known without the generation of new paradigms as it is deductive in nature. This reasoning rests on the foundations of already established facts and extant boundaries, and works deductively from these in order to develop new facts that agree with extant models of knowledge. Ampliative reasoning however is quite different as it is inductive and so presents the potential for the development of new universals that move beyond or defy existent boundaries:

An inductive or analogical argument cannot be limited to what is given or antecedently construed as determined: it bursts the bounds of the known and breaks the barriers that our literal knowledge imposes on us.47

One technique of ampliative reasoning is the hypothesis, where the observation of similarities in phenomena may lead (through further investigation) to new laws by the presentation of speculative solutions to problematic aspects of the phenomena. In this type of thinking dissonance is viewed as a problem to be solved through the creation of an overarching theory that ‘does away’ with the problem. Another is the metaphor, where separate entities are combined or category mistakes are deliberately constructed in order to ‘...go beyond the given [and] represent cognitive breakthroughs.’48 Here the creativity is two-fold, both in the creation of the category mistake but, more importantly, in exploring the potentialities of the comparison. A third example of ampliative reasoning presented by Lipman is the generalisation, which develops initial conclusions by the examining similarities in discrete but related phenomena. Generalisations are not useful in understanding discrete objects or events but are the oft-needed springboard towards a deeper understanding of the problematic situation.

48 Thinking in Education, 249.
Caring Thinking

The most significant shift from Lipman’s earlier work when compared to his later work is the emphasis he places on caring thinking. As a discrete category, it does not appear in the earlier edition of *Thinking in Education*, but in the later edition, as well as writings on P4C more generally, substantial space is devoted to the topic. It perhaps mirrors the shift from an emphasis on *logic* as critical thinking to *judgements* as critical thinking. This is not to say however that the affective elements of P4C were not acknowledged and considered important in the earlier work. Through involvement in the community of inquiry, students are developed socially to become more aware of the existence of other opinions, beliefs and character types. They can also become more aware of the disparate modes in which others think, and the consequent value of these modes when compared to their own. Lipman et al. believed that this process of interpersonal dialogue encourages interpersonal sensitivity, and that ‘[u]nless children have some insight into the nature of the individuals with whom they share their lives, they are not likely to make sound judgments regarding them.’ Lipman et al. suggested as well that, by developing the cognitive power of children, as well as a larger range of reasoned mental acts, their program might develop a capacity for interpersonal sensitivity.

More specifically however, in terms of the explicit contribution caring thinking makes to the ability to make good judgments, Lipman wrote that

> Caring thinking involves a double meaning, for on the one hand it means to think solicitously about that which is the subject matter of our thought, and on the other hand it is to be concerned about one’s manner of thinking. Thus, for example, a man writing a love letter writes lovingly to the person to whom the letter is addressed, while at the same time he is anxious about the letter itself.

We care about things that matter, and in making this apparently circular observation Lipman draws on Ryle who argued against cognitive and causal explanations for such caring (or any other type of *apparently* oriented) thinking. So when we listen closely to a child explaining an experience we do so in two ways, because of the care we have for the child, and by the way we carefully attend to each word and observation. And we do so not because the child has, via a series of cognitive surmises, inspired that solicitousness in us, but because we were already concerned to listen. This suggests that caring, as an aspect of thinking, is a thinking disposition that is seamlessly evident and necessary in such moments, and not a tool to be wielded at will in the way that we might use our knowledge of fallacies. Lipman presents some examples of caring thinking that he acknowledges is not exhaustive including appreciative, affective,

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49 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 65.

50 Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 262.
normative and empathic. Both Fisher and Burgh et al. developed Lipman’s categories by aligning caring thinking with collaboration and cooperation. Fisher, for example, renames caring as cooperative thinking and defines it using a series of indicative behaviours such as building self-esteem, empathy and respect towards others, and by questions such as ‘What do others think?’ Burgh et al., in aligning caring thinking with collaboration, claim that ‘learners function at a higher intellectual level when in a collaborative environment,’ and lists elements intrinsic to such an environment such as sharing, discussion and welcoming others’ views.

The above three-part model of thinking is not meant to act as a set of discrete thinking modes that the student applies independently as required. It is in fact based on the Greek three-part division of the world of human endeavour and ideas, that being the true, the beautiful and the good:

\[\text{as regulative ideas} \quad \text{the True} \quad \text{the Beautiful} \quad \text{the Good}\]

\[\text{as modes of thinking} \quad \text{critical} \quad \text{creative} \quad \text{caring}\]

For Lipman, as for the Greeks, good thinking, or higher order thinking, could not be restricted to the one category, as each relies on the counter balance and augmentation of the other two. Good thinking therefore requires that the thinker apply all of the above categories in any act of judgment in order for that judgment to be sound. Lipman is clear about this and writes that ‘...we adopt the most rigorous interpretation: namely that something not qualify as "higher-order thinking" unless it meets all three specifications. Merely to satisfy one criterion, however brilliantly, is not enough.’

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51 Adapted from ibid., 264-71.
52 Fisher, Teaching Thinking: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 32.
53 Burgh, Freakley, and Field, Ethics and the Community of Inquiry: Education for Deliberative Democracy, 112.
55 Ibid., 63.
The Community of Inquiry

There are three steps suggested to facilitate philosophical sessions with pupils: 1) Reading of a novel that includes ambiguities and paradoxes; 2) Collecting pupils’ questions concerning ambiguous or paradoxical situations that intrigue them and that they would like to discuss among their peers; 3) Holding a dialogue in the community of inquiry (CoI), in order, as a group, to construct elements of response to their questions.\(^{56}\)

In their earliest work, Lipman et al. make explicit their beliefs, based on the work of Mead and Vygotsky, of the relationship between rational dialogue and rational thinking. Within a classroom group, under the direction of a trained teacher, the development of a \textit{sustained rational dialogue} amongst students is a critical aspect of their P4C program. It is at this point that they introduce the concept of the ‘community of inquiry’ (CoI), which they define as a classroom of children thinking together philosophically. While the books and manuals Lipman and his team produced provided a curriculum for teachers, a specific pedagogical framework was also important. Lipman viewed the CoI as an environment where students were the primary agents of their own learning, and where they should be allowed to freely inquire into that which is important and relevant in their lives. The CoI has a specific purpose as well, which is to satisfy the need for knowledge through the development and execution of inquiries. These inquiries should result in the satisfaction of curiosity, and suggest further avenues of exploration, as well as result in refinements to the inquiry process itself. The CoI not only allows for investigation but teaches the skills necessary to investigate, and within the philosophical realm these are the three thinking skills described above. Lipman’s ideal CoI differs substantially then from a class going about its regular business and he describes it as follows:

\begin{quote}
First I think we need to see that the community of inquiry is not aimless. It is a process that aims at producing a \textit{product} - at some kind of settlement or judgment, however partial and tentative this may be. Second, the process has a \textit{sense of direction}; it moves where the argument takes it. Third, the process is not merely conversation or discussion; it is \textit{dialogical}... Finally, there is the \textit{matter of using the community of inquiry to operationalize and implement the definitions of critical, creative, and caring thinking} [my italics].\(^{57}\)
\end{quote}

The above description gives some pointers as to its composition, which Lipman further develops in his description of the essential elements of a CoI. What must be noted at this point is the very particular language that Lipman uses to explicate his method. Words and concepts such as ‘product’, ‘direction’, ‘dialogical’, and ‘operationalize’ are significant in the manner and

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\(^{57}\) Lipman, \textit{Thinking in Education}, 83-84.
intention with which they mark out Lipman’s philosophical method and program. These, along with the role of the teacher, will be discussed below.

*Productive Direction*

Lipman first of all believed that a CoI should be product oriented. A standard class might produce a ‘thing’ such as an essay, a completed worksheet or a piece of art, each of which demonstrate the learning of skills or prove the comprehension of ideas. The product of a CoI can be quite different, without excluding these possibilities. Lipman borrows from Buchler one possible definition:

> Where we can speak of a conclusion at all, it may be developed only after many hours, and then with qualifications befitting the circumstances. But, regardless of this, a product is inevitably established in any given hour of discussion.\(^{58}\)

This definition of a product is one that has similarities with typical definitions, in the sense that work has been done, progress has been made and there exists evidence of these achievements. While not allowing for wild and irrelevant divergences, it is important that the motive force within a CoI allows it to follow the investigation along a particular path which best offers the potential for the discovery of answers. This suggests a corollary aspect of the CoI, which is that it should be directional. A meandering conversation, about a jumble of concepts that are bound together vaguely by a theme, may well provoke the interest of students at varying times over its duration. Eventually though the conversation’s absence of objective will realise itself in a lack of product and applicability. Lipman, borrowing from the work of Dewey, presents a definition of the quality of a CoI that ensures its focus.

> Every community of inquiry has about it a requiredness... that lends it a sense of direction, and every participant in such a community partakes of that qualitative presence, which is the tertiary quality of which Dewey speaks.\(^{59}\)

A tertiary quality is not one that is found by analysing closely the occurrences that take place within the realm of discussion, nor is it necessarily the subject matter or the presence of a teacher manipulating the conversation forward in a particular direction. Dewey describes a tertiary character as one that results from the uniqueness of the situation under investigation and the effect this has on the members and their motivations in finding answers. Lipman uses terms such as perplexing, cheerful and disconsolate as examples of tertiary quality descriptors. They present both a binding force for a community as well as a directional motivation. The tertiary quality then defines a community’s investigative and motivational aim.

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\(^{58}\) Buchler, J. in *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
Dialogue and the Question

Another characteristic of the CoI is that the quality of exchange that takes place between its members is dialogical rather than conversational. A conversation is a mode of interpersonal development and its work is the maintenance of relationships. The work of a dialogue is quite different. Rather than the maintenance of relationships, its purpose is work itself; the work of inquiring and discovering. This process requires a structure different to that of a conversation—which perhaps can be defined in part by its lack of structure. Splitter and Sharp write that for an exchange to be classed as a dialogue it must be;\(^60\)

1. Structured around a problematic and contestable question to which the CoI is seeking resolution,
2. Self-regulating and self-correcting so that the conversation is productive and rational,
3. Egalitarian so that the CoI members are accepted as having needs and ideas that are equally important,
4. Guided by mutual interests where the course of the inquiry satisfies the imperatives of the community members.

Those taking part in a dialogue are conscious of a shared need to arrive at some point that is in part pre-determined by their agreement to take part in the dialogue. Where a conversation seeks to find harmonious balance, in dialogue ‘...disequilibrium is enforced in order to enforce forward movement [where] each argument evokes a counterargument that pushes itself beyond the other and pushes the other beyond itself.’\(^61\) Members of the dialogue use each other as a sounding board and resource; to enforce their own thinking or examine it for deficiencies and to provide an idea that moves an inquiry further. The rules underpinning dialogue as well must conform to standards of logic and reason. In a dialogue this places the incumbency of reason on all members. Therefore “[o]ne of the most important advantages of converting the classroom into a community of inquiry ... is that the members of the community begin looking for and correcting each other’s methods and procedures.’\(^62\) Finally the path of the dialogue itself must align with the norms of rational inquiry – counter examples must be sought, evidence must be provided, consistency must be demanded, and assumptions must be tested.

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\(^60\) Adapted from Splitter and Sharp, Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry 34-35.
\(^61\) Lipman, Thinking in Education, 232.
\(^62\) Ibid., 121.
The path to philosophical and conceptual clarity is traced by way of dialogue amongst students. It is here that the discussion and debate of ideas is the essential and central method by which children ‘do’ their philosophy through what is called the community of inquiry. Lipman et al. believed that such a method is intrinsic to philosophy and wrote that ‘[b]uilt into the very nature of philosophy is the methodology by which it is best taught—questioning and discussion.’63 This brings us to the fulcrum on which the nexus of dialogue and direction rests, that being the question. Fisher, in discussing the question, writes that ‘...the formal practice of philosophical enquiry [is] a shared experience focusing on questions of importance for the participants...’64 This suggests that the question is one that the students in the CoI have encountered in their everyday lives as a result of a problematic experience. The motivation for students to answer it is intrinsic, in that a satisfactory resolution satisfies an authentic need for such. Fisher’s definition states only that the question be important. Splitter and Sharp go further when they write that ‘...the reconstruction of the classroom as a dialogical community of inquiry depends largely on the nature and quality of the questions raised by teachers and students.’65 They draw a clear distinction between the types of questions generally posed by teachers in traditional classrooms (ordinary and rhetorical) and those posed by students (inquiring) in the CoI. In their model they criticise ordinary and rhetorical questions that are meant only to elicit facts from either teachers or students in order to accumulate propositional knowledge. The inquiry question however seeks information that none of the interlocutors necessarily has.

The Philosophical Pedagogue

In the preface to their book Philosophy in the Classroom Lipman et al. firmly ground their program in the philosophical heritage that began in Greece 2,500 years ago. The strength of Socrates’ example lies in the fact that he ‘...models intellectual inquiry for us, yet refrains from imposing on us the products of his own intellectual inquiry.’66 This model of the teacher as a facilitator of the student understanding, as an equal partner in dialogue, and as the ‘mid-wife’ of others’ ideas, underpins much of their beliefs about P4C teacher strategies and dispositions. With the focus in P4C on the process of thinking, the teacher does not challenge students so much on matters of fact, but rather on techniques of reason. And given the fact that children can only learn how to think by practicing and articulating thought, the teacher must

63 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom, 102.
64 Fisher, Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 119.
65 Splitter and Sharp, Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry 48.
66 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom, xiii.
necessarily ensure the students to do the hard work of thinking by allowing them prominence in articulating ideas and challenging contributions. The Socratic pedagogue’s role is to expose students to the possibility of philosophical engagement and draw out the thoughts of students in discussion with their peers.

With his in mind there are a range of qualities the P4C teacher must demonstrate, the most important of which can best be introduced by this quote from Lone:

> Although there is not unanimity among us about the proper role of the teacher in the classroom and what degree of authority she rightfully holds, there is agreement in the philosophy for children community that in many respects teacher and students are co-learners.67

Much as Socrates expressed ignorance of answers to his questions, and then proceeded to work them out with the help of his interlocutors, the P4C teacher, by presenting herself as a model of the philosophical inquirer, learns along with her students as they learn. This occurs in an atmosphere that does not place students and teachers in the familiar roles played out in traditionalist education models. When examining philosophical ideas, whether one is a teacher, a student or a professional philosopher, the orientation towards the subject under examination should be one of openness and fallibility. This is to say that the potential for correction and development is always one of the possibilities of engagement in ideas. I am not romanticising the thoughts of students, and suggesting that they are a source of great wisdom that adults should pay heed to. In a CoI, where the dialogical partnership is one of respect and equality, there should be, as part of the partnership, an equal opportunity to learn together about both the question under discussion as well as the ways that communities develop together. Lipman further adds that ‘[t]he teaching of philosophy requires teachers who are disposed to examine ideas, to engage in dialogical enquiry, and to respect the humanity of the children being taught.’68 These demands generally extend beyond what might be found in teacher education and suggest that P4C educators must enter the community already oriented towards, in particular, ideas and respect for students.

The first condition a teacher must demonstrate is a commitment to philosophical ideas and inquiry. Here the teacher as a model of the philosopher is important. Inquiring teachers will not present knowledge as established fact (to be consumed as such), nor will they demonstrate satisfaction with simple answers to complex questions. Even less will they expect children to be satisfied with these categories of knowledge, and so they will demand of their

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68 Lipman, Philosophy Goes to School, 151.
students substantial investigation of problematic situations. Teachers must present themselves as models of the philosophical process, in that they demonstrate a commitment to respectful, reasoned and logical thinking. Teachers must also be aware of the nature of the discussion and whether its content is in fact philosophical. There are substantial differences between the various types of conversation that can occur within classrooms. Debates over scientific fact or religious experience are important but not necessarily philosophical. Earnest discussions about politics, global warming or poverty are equally important but equally unlikely to be philosophical in nature. According to Lipman et al., philosophical discussions are concerned with matters potentially related to but equally independent of these subjects. They believe that ‘...philosophy is concerned to clarify meanings, uncover assumptions and presuppositions, analyze concepts, consider the validity of reasoning processes, and investigate the implications of ideas and the consequences in human life of holding certain ideas rather than others.’

The second condition Lipman demands of the P4C teacher is that they engage in genuine dialogue with students. In this regard questioning is one of the most important teacher behaviours. The skills that support good questioning are many—but the success of good questioning is easier to define. A good question first of all presents the teacher as one who is engaged in philosophical investigation rather than one who knows the answer and is playing a game of guess-what-I’m-thinking. The curious teacher is the ideal model with which to demonstrate the value of curiosity to children. As stated above, the teacher must also, in the question, present a problem that is genuinely philosophical rather than scientific or otherwise. Little philosophical conversation can be generated from a question such as ‘How do we know the Earth revolves around the Sun?’ Considerable philosophical conversation however can be based around the question ‘What effect does the knowledge that the Earth revolves around the Sun have on our belief systems?’ The former question can be quickly answered with reference to scientific understanding, while the latter could involve speculations in epistemology, metaphysics, logic and more. With this in mind Lipman et al. present a range of question based techniques that teachers can use in order to generate and sustain a genuine philosophical discussion which include eliciting views or opinions, requesting definitions, indicating fallacies and seeking consistency. Note that in these questioning strategies the teacher is offering very little in the way of content. Teachers must also present

69 Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, Philosophy in the Classroom, 107.
70 Ibid., 113-28.
themselves as good listeners, a skill that requires both interpersonal sensitivity and a keen ear for philosophical nuance. In the buzz of conversation that can be created during a philosophy session subtle insights presented by those who are not inclined to present their ideas forcefully can be lost unless the teacher is acutely in tune with what is being said. In this situation the teacher must not be only hearing and comprehending the words of the student, but listening for the philosophical importance and intent in the words.

The third condition is respect for children’s opinions. Here the teacher assumes that their knowledge of a situation is incomplete and, in acknowledging a child’s right to speculation, models the behaviour of a person who is similarly engaged in philosophical investigation. The teacher is also acknowledging the fact that children on occasion can provide philosophical insight and creativity to conversations. This respect does not free the child from the requirement for reasoned thinking. One corollary of respect as well is that children feel that they are able to contribute freely to conversations without the fear that they might be put down in one of the many ways available to the insensitive teacher. The optimal condition ‘...is one in which the students trust the teacher sufficiently to risk criticism of the teacher’s methods or values, because they know the teacher will consider such criticisms from them fairly.’

Here the relationship has been established by the teacher as one that is respectful of both the adults and children and respectful of the rules of reasonable discussion. A final aspect of respect is the avoidance of indoctrination. The value of P4C is diminished if teachers do not present themselves as arbiters of reason and fairness alone. Any attempt by teachers to supplant reason with their own values is one that will damage the model of philosophical inquiry. This should not prevent teachers from presenting their points of view but it should be done so in a way that adheres to the same guidelines of the Col that students work within.

Democracy

Lipman’s last word on the Col is its political significance. While allowing that democratically organised states might provide the best opportunity for its members to have the best quality lives, this does not suggest that the democratic model cannot be improved. Any improvement in the model however would have to be bottom up and generational as it would require a shift in the thinking of its constituent members as well as modifications of the paradigm itself. Lipman suggests that

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71 Ibid., 89.
On the whole... our society is not one that seeks strenuously to merge the democratic and inquiry processes... It seems to me that the notion of democracy as inquiry merges rationality and consensus and that this merger is superior to being guided by either criterion alone.\textsuperscript{72} Currently the democratic responsibilities of citizens rely for the most part on their staying abreast in general terms with the policies of parties and then deciding (by voting on election day) on which of those polices best represent their interests and aspirations. This quality of engagement can be compared to the classroom in which a teacher presents information to a class which is understood, assimilated and then reproduced by students in their own words during a test—an election day of sorts. Lipman, again borrowing from Dewey, presents a different model of democracy and education that aligns in means-end fashion. He suggests that the better model of democracy is ‘democracy-as-inquiry’ in which representative institutions inquire into problematic issues and debates that are arenas of substantial dialogue. Here the public are actively involved in these processes and so demand higher standards of investigation and problem solving. The means by which this could be achieved, given that schools educate the voting public of the future, would be the transformation of learning to that of ‘education-as-inquiry’; the model exemplified by the P4C program. Here the learning relies on the application of the inquiry process to meaningful problems and so is twofold – knowledge is constructed and a process is learned.

Within the CoI other qualities and skills of the democratic participant are taught – both explicitly and implicitly. From an early age children within this environment are taught to understand that their opinions are not the only ones that exist, and their beliefs will conflict with other members of their community. They will also learn that their generalised opinions formed from particular circumstances will not always withstand the scrutiny and evaluation of a range of peers whose experiences are different. Moderation of their needs, the elimination of prejudice, and the tolerance of others’ imperatives becomes a practical requirement for membership of the classroom community, just as it does for the democratic state. The community member requires more than the skills of rationalisation to adjust their views in line with this reality. A quality of caring must be developed from which an ethical concern soon arises which leads to the questioning of ideas. The problem of intolerance is then solved in two ways—by the investigation of its assumptions and by a community of disparate individuals working together to share their experience in a caring and reasonable environment.

\textsuperscript{72} Lipman, \textit{Thinking in Education}, 246.
Concept Development

Along with the *three-part model of thinking* and the *community of inquiry*, a third distinguishing feature of the P4C program is the emphasis it places on *conceptual development*. Community of inquiry dialogue is largely based around the idea of concepts, and the development of these concepts is central to the P4C program. Kennedy and Kennedy, in their review of P4C, see the relationship in these essential terms:

A community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) is understood here as an intentional speech community... who meet in order to dialogue with each other about philosophical concepts—by which we mean common, central and contestable concepts like truth, justice, friendship, economy, person, education, gender and so forth.  

For them the purpose of the community’s coming together is located in the *intention to discuss concepts*. This is a typical view of the necessity of conceptual discussion in CoIs. In the P4C texts I have examined (and as I will demonstrate below), the same claims are made about the centrality of concepts, both in terms of what philosophy is, and what goes on in philosophical discussions. This practice has traced a path from Socrates up to the present day theorising of philosophers. Fisher as well notes that ‘[o]ne of the aims... central to all philosophy, is that of concept development.’  

Much of the P4C curriculum materials and theorising is concerned with the understanding of concepts, and as they can be defined within communities of inquiry. The first point being made here is that philosophy is primarily and centrally concerned with concept development. This is not to suggest that other types of philosophising are not recognised, but there is rarely any indication about what these other types of philosophising might be. The second point being made is that CoIs are concerned with the dialogical development of concepts, and that concept oriented dialogue is an intrinsic feature of CoIs. This is emphasised once again by Splitter and Sharp:

To the extent that these concepts can be identified and located within the dialogue that is taking place in the community, we have, once again, an indicator as to the existence and nature of a philosophical discussion.

To make this point is not only to criticise it—there is no doubt that it is correct to place concept development as an aim of philosophical inquiry and recognise its productivity in advancing philosophical discourse. I will show however that philosophising can be more than just concept development.

A list of concepts typically provided in P4C materials would read like the below:

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75 Splitter and Sharp, *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry* 130.
Concepts such as true, good, beautiful, real, fair, space, time, dreaming, friendship and self are as fascinating and intriguing to adults as they are to most thinking adults.  

There are of course countless other examples of concepts but, for the purposes of P4C, they are restricted to those ideas that young people can claim experience with and, at least, an initial understanding of in practical situations as they occur in everyday life. No young person would have any trouble using the above concepts in natural language situations with a large degree of accuracy and valid applicability. Lipman et al. describe concepts as regulatory and normative so far as living in our society is concerned, and so their rigorous analysis and constructed understanding is a powerful tool by which one can live. The concept, in the manner of being normative, tells us exactly that—the normal way of thinking about the world. As such they are manifestations of society’s deeply held beliefs about what is right and good. Cam adds that ‘[c]oncepts make intellectual knowledge and understanding possible. They underpin language and inform both perception and action.’  

So while he agrees that they are guides to behaviour, he also gives concepts a series of other important roles. We use words like ‘friendship’ and ‘good’ in everyday language with the expectation people will know what we are talking about. They also shape the perceptions we have about the world around us, and in fact we would be in some ways socially blind without them. As our concepts change so does our knowledge of the world. Golding suggests as well that ‘[w]e explain, describe, and make sense of the world by using concepts... They form the framework and background of our thinking, rather than what we think about.’ So, in this sense, they order our thinking into ideas that are representative of much larger and more complex pieces of information and experience that is developed over time, and communicated through the efficient means that conceptual language is. This conceptual language is rarely the explicit subject of our talk, and instead is a form of tacit understanding that we all rely on without necessarily recognising this fact in our day to day lives. This is one of the aims of P4C—to draw these concepts into explicit conversation.

Splitter and Sharp suggest concepts as ideal subjects of inquiry because they are common to the experience of all, central to the way we understand or make sense of our experience, and are contestable or problematic. Perhaps the best motivation for a CoI forming and remaining bound together is that they have something in common to talk about. It stands to reason that that this commonality is required for there to be a shared purpose and reason

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76 Ibid., 92-93.
77 Cam and Primary English Teaching Association (Australia), Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom, 66.
79 See Splitter and Sharp, Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry 130.
for their coming together and remaining engaged in dialogue. Concepts are also good topics of dialogue because they are of the greatest importance in the way we conceive the world. This importance lends a natural weight and imperative to the CoI and so acts as an intrinsic force in keeping the dynamics and momentum optimal. It is also improbable to think of a concept for which the work of thinking has been completed. This means that any conceptual definition that is the subject of inquiry will result in argument and contestability over meaning. Hand suggests a different reason for the teaching of concepts in schools that concerns method as well as content:

The question is whether it is possible to identify a philosophical method that is (i) central to the mainstream practice of philosophy and (ii) capable of being understood by children. I think the answer to this question is yes, and the method that fits the bill is conceptual analysis.®

As a philosopher his aim is to replicate some aspects of mature philosophical investigation in schools’ P4C programs. While dismissing the abstract practice of symbolic logic (for example) as too difficult to undertake in schools, he sees concepts as being both viable and valid subjects of philosophical discussion. Other practices such as, for example, the history of philosophy or the rigorous study of actual philosophical texts would also be unachievable and require too much in the way of an academic philosophy background as to be practicable. The study of concepts however is both a genuine practice and it is also achievable, at some level, by even the youngest of children. The reasoning here can be extrapolated to members of a community of inquiry, irrespective of age, who may therefore participate without the necessity of the background or skills normally considered a requirement in authentic philosophical practice. Burgh et al. suggest that concept development ‘...is integral to the development of understanding and effective language use.’® The complexities of cognition that are required think through the various processes that are required to refine an idea are equally complexities of language, so the ability to think a through concept in a public setting is to be able to speak it as well. Cam offers a broad vision of education more generally that can, in part, rest on students engaging in concept development:

To the extent that we lack conceptual diversity, our thought is restricted; when our conceptual structures are rudimentary, so are our thoughts; when our concepts lack coherence, our thought is conceptually confused; and when we fail to make firm connections between our concepts, more complex meanings elude us.®

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® Burgh, Freakley, and Field, Ethics and the Community of Inquiry: Education for Deliberative Democracy, 114.
® Cam and Primary English Teaching Association (Australia), Thinking Together : Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom, 66.
For him this practice leads to a series of positive educational outcomes. The experience of diversity is key to the CoI, and for Cam this is reflected positively in conceptual knowledge. I imagine that he might be saying two things here; that we should be aware of the problematic nature of the concepts we use, and that there are a range of competing views about their definition and practical application. I think as well he is saying that a concept, even when satisfactorily defined, is still a complex of ideas that intertwine irreducibly. This irreducible nature is a key learning in itself, and one that paradoxically means it will always escape meaning at some point of investigation. It is only the ‘rudimentary’ thinker who can satisfy himself with a finished definition. Cam also suggests that work on conceptuality, as well as having a clarifying effect, leads to connections and complexity, qualities we readily ascribe to an educated person.

I have shown that here is general agreement about what a concept is in P4C as well as its importance in Cols. There is I believe as well a correspondingly small range of differing ideas about what conceptual development is. Lipman writes that ‘[c]oncept-formation involves organizing information into relational clusters and then analysing and clarifying them so as to expedite their employment in understanding and judging.’ Lipman also believes that part of the process of concept development ‘…involves skill in mobilizing reasoning processes so that they converge on and identify particular conceptual issues. Furthermore, concepts must be analyzed and their implications sought.’ In this he sees a practical aspect to concept development which lies in being able to see where concepts are being used such that they present problematic situations to inquiring communities. Burgh et al., in their explanation, write that ‘[c]onceptual exploration requires analysis: defining our terms, making distinctions, testing our definitions, finding counterexamples, and sorting things into classes.’ So while the processes and terms are different, the sense of the activity is similar in that it is analytical in intent and technical and rational in terms of the tools and processes used. Once again, the idea that words and ideas should be sorted into groups is evident, as is the duty of correctly defining words within these groups and deciding on whether further similarities and differences can be found in the terms under discussion. Hand’s understanding of concept development is two-fold; one

\[83\] Lipman, Thinking in Education, 184.
\[84\] Philosophy Goes to School, 80.
\[85\] Burgh, Freakley, and Field, Ethics and the Community of Inquiry: Education for Deliberative Democracy, 160.
oriented towards the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity about language in use, and the other oriented towards social change:

At one pole is the idea... that the aim of studying conceptual schemes is simply to get clear about them... At the other pole of the spectrum is the idea that most or many of our concepts or conceptual schemes are bound up with erroneous ‘folk theories’ about the world and that philosophy, far from leaving things as they are, has as the radical aim of dismantling and rebuilding conceptual schemes to better fit and facilitate our developing scientific understanding of reality.  

For Hand there is a clear distinction between the two types of analysis, with one being considered more disruptive than the other. Hand’s distinctions could be read into the definitions of conceptual development above without too much effort, but his definition is useful in that it brings an important idea about the intents of philosophy to mind. In my reading of Lipman and P4C works, I am not of the opinion that one is favoured over the other as a rule, and believe that they are seen as equally viable intentions for communities of inquiry. I think it is certain however that in the many examples of conceptual development presented in texts, be they the transcripts of dialogues amongst students, the types of activities presented as best practice, or the list of processes that must be taught, the emphasis lies in conceptual clarity rather than in change motivated by social criticality. This is not to say however that one can’t be the genesis of the other, and if we think of Socrates’ motivation for conceptual clarity, it is possible to see that he was motivated by a desire for social change as much as intellectual curiosity. Lipman perhaps recognises this in writing that we do the work of concept development in CoIs ‘...so as to form principles, criteria, arguments, explanations, and so on.’ In this there is the suggestion of a moral or ethical element in the community’s work that is a potential corollary of concept development, but which is not so obvious given the very technical language that is used to describe the activity.

The Narrative Text

Lipman et al. in their early work present an answer to the missing dimension of ‘thinking’ in the form of a comprehensive philosophical program that spanned the primary and secondary years of schooling. The program consisted of a series of novels accompanied by a manual of activities and guidelines for teachers to use. The manual was used by teachers to point both teachers and their students’ thinking towards the particular philosophical issues that had been embedded by the stories’ authors. Both the stories and the manuals were written by either

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87 Lipman, Thinking in Education, 184.
Lipman or his colleagues. Lipman, in describing the reasons for choosing to produce narrative texts, writes:

Only literature has shown the delicacy and flexibility needed to penetrate and communicate the many-layered multiplicity of human relationships. Consequently, the improvement of moral judgment will require for its effectiveness the construction of a special body of literary works that will embody... ethical understanding.  

Lipman suggests that the expository text type has dominated teacher education texts with the result that knowledge is presented as discipline heavy but empty of meaning. In response to this Lipman believes that teachers of philosophy should use narrative forms of text as provocative vessels of situations from which philosophical investigations can develop. The expository text presents a ‘truth’ already defined and ready for memorisation. Readers of these texts may be less inclined to consider the problems inherent in all presentations of knowledge, while readers of narratives have its problematic nature presented to them by the absence of explicitly composed knowledge pieces. In arguing for the narratives he wrote for his P4C course, Lipman states that it was possible for him embed a range of elements within them that strengthen their potential as teaching instruments. Splitter and Sharp similarly observe that

They [the students] need to know how to proceed, and one effective way to help them acquire this procedural knowledge is to involve them, intellectually as well as emotionally, in the lives of characters who enact and model the processes of inquiry...

Discussions, whether in classrooms, peer groups or families, portray particular qualities of CoIs in the narratives. The child characters were written to demonstrate many of the characteristics required by participants in CoIs. Lipman’s texts present a unified world of philosophical learning with the characters embodying the qualities of philosophers, the modelling of CoIs, the embedding of classical philosophical questions in realistic situations, and the ability to present conceptual understanding and schematic constructs. Lipman insists as well on the importance of the instructional manuals that were devised for teachers to assist in the instructional situations that were constructed by the novels.

Lipman et al.’s work in curriculum development and narrative text creation had a substantial influence on the P4C materials that followed. Cam, for example, produced a series of three books and manuals that both collected stories as well as presented stories written specifically for the series. The first edition is a collection of stories that have ‘...been chosen

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90 Phillip Cam, *Thinking Stories 3* (Narrabeen: Hale and Iremonger, 1997).
for [their] ability to promote children's natural curiosity about issues such as friendship, multiculturalism, magic and make-believe, order in nature, and freedom and rights. Later editions contain stories that have been written by Cam himself. Sharp and Splitter developed a series of books as well, one of which is called The Doll Hospital. In the accompanying manual they write that '[t]he philosophical content of The Doll Hospital is indebted to inquiries that were central to ancient Greek philosophy... the meaning and status of real, good, true, beautiful and person.' The authors demonstrate that their orientation in philosophy is essentially traditional, and that concentration in the book and manual is on the development of concepts. Fisher produced a book that consisted of a collection of stories sourced elsewhere called Stories for Thinking. It ‘...introduces ways to develop thinking, discussion and literacy skills with individuals, groups, or classes [and includes] discussion plans and activities related to each story.’ The intent, content and resources are similar to those listed above. It is interesting to note as well though that each of the above authors also recommend choosing extant and well-known works to use in classrooms. Fisher is critical though of Lipman’s stories, as they express philosophical themes ‘...at the expense of the motivating and imaginatively nourishing qualities of the best of children’s fiction.’ He suggests a far more expansive set of texts that are viable subjects of dialogue. These range from Kafka’s Metamorphosis to the folk story Cinderella, and he includes non-print texts such as music, video and drama in his selections. Cam as well suggests that any story meeting a set of criteria is appropriate, suggesting that you ‘...ask yourself whether the story raises—or even better, explores—any issue or problem that doesn’t look as if could be settled simply by observation, by calculation, or by reference to established fact.’ And Splitter and Sharp agree with Nussbaum who ‘...makes a compelling case for approaching ethical questions via the particular lives and complex predicaments of characters such as those created by Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Iris Murdoch, Samuel Beckett and Marcel Proust... due to the complexity of their ideas and examination of central concepts, though they equally recognise that these writers are inappropriate for young children.

While there is some disagreement about whether or not a story needs to be constructed specifically to inspire conceptual exploration in a community of inquiry, there is

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95 Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom (Sydney: Primary English Teaching Association and Hale & Iremonger, 1995), 23-24.
97 Splitter and Sharp, Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry 100.
more agreement on the purpose of the use of narrative. Due to what should have been the careful selection of a story, some problematic situation or another should feature in the text. Schertz describes the scene as follows:

Students sit in a circle facing one another while the teacher presents a stimulus, usually a narrative with philosophical themes, which encourages them to ask questions and provides a gateway for theoretical exploration.98

The story first of all is seen as a ‘prompt,’ which it literally does—induces or provokes students into developing a question around the situation presented in the text. Fisher agrees that ‘[s]tories have long been seen as a natural stimulus for discussion, investigation and problem-solving in schools,’99 and for him the story is a ‘stimulus.’ Here the students’ attention is once again drawn to the story and is motivated by its content to develop philosophical questions. So while the students may have begun P4C sessions with their minds elsewhere, the sharing of the story and the initial discussion that takes place around the examination of the story leads the students towards a question of a conceptual nature. At this point, once the question has begun, the story is laid to one side and not referred to again. The story’s membership of the community is restricted to this initial role and takes no further place in the dialogue.

P4C Method in the Classroom
While the body of P4C literature and materials is diverse, it is possible to justify the examples of classroom method outlined below as distinctly recognisable as P4C. The procedures and routines I describe are those that are consistently recommended by this body of resources. The short instructional film Thinking Skills: Child Philosophers100 is a case in point. The film comes from a UK teacher resource website called SchoolsWorld.TV, but it is the inclusion of two interview subjects, as well as the routine the film exemplifies in the recorded demonstration class, that makes it a valid reference for establishing the existence of a commonly accepted P4C practice. The first of these interview subjects is Robert Fisher, an education academic and author of several books on teaching thinking and P4C that have been referred to above. Fisher recommends P4C as one way to teach philosophical thinking and devotes space to the Lipman P4C materials and their genesis.101 In his other works he is clear about the steps by which philosophical inquiry takes place and lists them as:102

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99 Fisher, Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 72.
102 Adapted from Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 264.
1. The poem [or other literary text] is read aloud.
2. Students reflect on the poem.
3. Students choose an idea that they found interesting in the poem.
4. Teacher invites students to ask questions that are listed on the board.
5. A question is chosen (voting is suggested).
6. Invite questioner to say why question was asked.
7. Teacher extends students’ thinking by further questioning and other activities.

As well, Will Ord, Chair of Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE), is interviewed in the video. SAPERE recognises that

P4C is a thorough pedagogy with considerable academic pedigree. Professor Matthew Lipman, frustrated by his students lack of engagement with learning and thinking, was influenced by educationalists and philosophers such as Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey as well as the tradition of Socratic dialogue... Children are taught how to create their own philosophical questions. They then choose one question that is the focus of a philosophical enquiry, or dialogue.103

I draw attention to the presence of these interview subjects as it adds credence to the fact that both Fisher, as a education academic specialising in the teaching of thinking, and SAPERE, as an organisation that promotes the teaching of philosophical thinking in schools, both firmly subscribe to the P4C tradition. Ord, in his introductory interview in the film, acknowledges the work of Lipman, when he says '[p]hilosophy for children began thirty five years ago with the work of Matthew Lipman... [and is now] practiced in sixty countries.'104

Throughout the film Thinking Skills: Child Philosophers we are shown the progression of what can be called an archetypal P4C class. The class begins with students filing into a classroom, most holding an object of some description. These objects are placed in a collection on the floor. Students arrange themselves in a seated circle around the objects, and we learn that the teacher has previously asked students to research Romeo and Juliet and bring something to class that they felt ‘symbolised or was part of the text in some way.’105 As a precursor to the philosophical discussion proper, the students are asked to explain why they brought in the objects they did, and explain the relationship of their chosen object to Romeo and Juliet. Following this the teacher outlines the purpose of the lesson, which is to examine oppositions in the text as well as the reasons for Shakespeare’s continued relevance today.

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104 Peters, “Thinking Skills: Child Philosophers “.
The teacher then emphasises to students that they are in a community of inquiry and that there are certain conventions guiding the conduct of such communities. She asks for examples of such conventions. One example is provided by a student who suggests that ‘everyone’s view point is valid as long as it’s appropriate for the discussion,’ a suggestion with which the teacher agrees. She then conducts a brief activity in which she projects patches of colour onto a white background after having darkened the classroom. The students are asked to share emotions or memories that come to mind when they look at the patches of colour. After this activity the teacher says she is going to invert usual instructional procedures by giving the students an answer for which they must develop a question. The teacher demands of the questions that they be broad rather than narrow. The answer the students are given is the concept ‘love’. The students then develop their questions and write them on the board. Following this, with a range of questions having been produced, students decide on one for the class to discuss. This question is chosen through a secret ballot. A student is chosen by the teacher to conduct the vote. The student conducting the vote tallies the hands and then announces the winner when all questions are read out and voted on. The question decided on is ‘What does the world have too much of that it could do without?’ At this point another student is chosen to act as the student moderator and conduct the philosophical inquiry. He begins by asking the student what he meant by the question and from here the dialogue develops. Following this initial discussion the teacher takes over and asks the students to consider the discussion they have just had in the context of Romeo and Juliet. Here the teacher acts as a Socratic figure and moderates the dialogue by demanding reasons for thinking as well as counter arguments from the students. This final section of the lesson is described by the teacher as a time for reflection. She asks then to consider everything that they’ve discussed, read, seen and thought about by sharing orally their thoughts.

Lending support to this model of philosophical inquiry are a range of P4C texts and teacher resources. Burgh at el. for example suggest that ‘[t]he most conducive arrangement for such [philosophical] activity is for students to be seated in a circle,’ which is a form of classroom organisation that can be seen in the previous example. They go on to suggest that ‘...using both fictional and non-fictional stimulus material and the process of selecting appropriate materials will help develop philosophical and inquiry skills...’, so long as the students and teacher facilitator are able to extract philosophical content. Golding describes the P4C model as ‘... a disciplined, dialogical inquiry [in which] students have learned to

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106 “Thinking Skills: Child Philosophers”.
107 Burgh, Freakley, and Field, Ethics and the Community of Inquiry: Education for Deliberative Democracy, 122.
108 Ibid., 137.
structure their own discussions—to stick to the point, test views and make reasoned judgements.' And Bleazby recommends that ‘COI participants must construct ideas or hypotheses, which will solve the problem at hand [which] is shaped by the needs, interests and understandings of the community.' More generally we can see how this model of philosophising reflects the imperatives of the various P4C materials referred to, as well as the underlying philosophical commitments that will be explored below. There is the emphasis on concept development, student centered problems, the choosing of a single question that gives the dialogue its productive direction, the utilisation of artefacts as stimulus material, and the emphasis on democracy manifested in the vote for a question. Perhaps most importantly however is that this inquiry model, both in practice and intention, sees philosophy as something akin to the practices of scientific communities, with its use of a particular method of philosophising within a community of inquirers that is oriented towards problem solving.

Conclusion
In the above section I have shown that the P4C program entails the practice of a collection of recognisable strategies and intentional orientations that enjoy widespread support in the standard texts. I proposed that the fundamental assumption in P4C is that the practice of philosophy is one that posits conceptual development as the most important product of this practice. Via the concept, students can acquire the language that enables them to enlarge upon their understanding of the world. I have demonstrated that this development takes place within a community of inquiry, a social space in which teachers and their students work towards conceptual clarity via rational dialogue. This dialogue is cultivated by the deliberate interventions of teachers who look towards Socrates as their pedagogical model. I have shown that the three-part model of thinking, and its various iterations, is frequently referred to as the basis by which the teacher can allow students the opportunity to become good thinkers. Finally, I have shown that these elements lend themselves to a recognisable method of philosophising that is recognised by leading practitioners. In the following section I will establish the philosophical basis of these elements, which will then allow me the opportunity to critique their merit.

Unpacking the Philosophy of Philosophy for Children

All of the above P4C practitioners and theorists, to varying degrees, cite American pragmatism as a significant influence in their respective developments of P4C. Another significant influence is the philosophical method and practice of Plato’s Socrates. A search of the citations in each of these books, as well as a reading of their explicit and implicit approaches to philosophising, confirm this. Fisher for example writes that

In America the tradition of community of enquiry developed by Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp and others was influenced by the philosophies of Socrates, John Dewey and C. S. Peirce.¹¹¹

This thick influence of pragmatism began in Lipman’s original iteration of P4C in the 1970s, and remains evident in current texts. In this regard the presence and influence of Dewey is particularly strong. Not always as evident, but just as important is the presence of pragmatic philosophy more generally, the initial development of which can be credited in part to Charles Peirce. Dewey is generally seen as the most important pragmatic philosopher, and developed its positions to its fullest extent during his life. It is important for the purpose of this work, then, that an explanation of pragmatic philosophy in general, as well as Peirce’s and Dewey’s particular influences as pragmatic philosophers on the development of P4C, is made explicit. I will also trace and discuss the influence of Socrates as a philosophical and pedagogical model.

Pragmatism

The work of the American philosophers Peirce and Dewey provided important theoretical foundations for the Lipman approach to philosophy for children. Peirce introduced the concept of a community of inquirers, by which he meant that scientific progress depends on the shared enquiry of a larger community of thought, a community that extends beyond the individual thinker and ultimately beyond the boundaries of time and place. In Dewey Lipman found a pedagogy for philosophical discussion that could help teachers convert their classrooms into communities of enquiry. Partly this was derived from Dewey’s insistence that learning comes from reflection on experience.¹¹²

I will begin with a general definition of pragmatism and then describe the particular aspects of Peirce’s scientific communities and Dewey’s philosophy of experience and education as they maintain a specific shaping influence on P4C. First of all, it is important to recognise pragmatism as a blend of naturalism and humanism. In naturalism, the world is viewed as monistic, or composed of a single type of material substance. Natural philosophy insists that all relations, occurrences and event are causal in nature, something that is possible given the material characteristics of all temporal objects. Therefore all events can be described in terms of cause and effect relationships, and all occurrences in the world can be explained ultimately

¹¹¹ Fisher, Teaching Thinking : Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom, 117.
¹¹² Ibid., 29.
in by recourse to the laws of physical science. To this naturalism Aiken adds what he calls a
humanistic requirement, which emphasises ‘that the criteria for philosophical or scientific
significance are the values and purposes of living human subjects... the desires, failures and
hopes that naturally arise from everyday life.’ From these derive the motivations for
investigation, the methods of discovery, and the centrality of the utility value of the findings to
the subject undertaking philosophical inquiry. Pragmatism, along with its scientific intentions,
privileges the role of the subject and makes a virtue of her ability to construct useful meanings
from intrinsically purposeful investigations. Any investigation therefore must first be
motivated by the subject’s encountering of a problem in a world defined by naturalism’s
ontology. There is a situated and human-oriented character to pragmatism. It is distinctly un-
objective in its affirmation of the subject’s role in constituting the world through her
interactions. Truth is not an objective set of facts to be found in the world, through
disembodied observation or metaphysical speculation, rather it is to be defined as the product
of an interaction encountered through problem solving interactions with the world.

Pragmatism then is an amalgam of science and lived experience. For Peirce,
‘[p]ragmatism originated as a theory of meanings, which located meanings of ideas in the
consequences of action which these ideas might be thought to predict or entail.’ From his
study of the scientific method, and his knowledge of logic, Peirce aimed to demonstrate the
necessary relationships between ideas, observations and actions, so that those ideas could be
defined in terms of the actions they required of human subjects and their measurable effects.
These ideas, when tested empirically, became either confirmed through observation of their
sensible properties and use value, or subject to further development due to their inability to
resolve the problems under investigation. This holds true whether the ideas are tested
rigorously in the laboratory, or in ‘life’. Peirce, as will be seen below, was adamant that the
standards of inquiry in ‘life’ should be exactly those of scientific experimentation. For James,
another seminal pragmatist, his preliminary definition of pragmatism is one that places the
practical outcome of an inquiry for the subject as absolutely central:

The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise
might be interminable... If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives
mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious we ought
to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other’s
being right.  

In this he is extrapolating from Peirce’s pragmatic tenet that beliefs are guides for behaviour. Just as a belief must have some material effect on action, so should the beliefs intrinsic to the meaning of a dispute (and its resolution) provide some beneficial advantage to those partaking in the dispute. The problems of philosophy are only those problems of people encountered in their environment, and the development of humans is tied to their overcoming of such problems through reflective interaction with the natural world. And so Dewey writes:

> Instead of the disputes of rivals about the nature of reality, we have the scene of human clash of social purpose and aspirations. Instead of impossible attempts to transcend experience, we have the significant record of the efforts of men to formulate the things of experience to which they are most deeply and passionately attached. Instead of impersonal and purely speculative endeavors to contemplate as remote beholders the nature of absolute things-in-themselves, we have a living picture of the choice of thoughtful men about what they would have life to be, and to what ends they would have men shape their intelligent activities.\(^{116}\)

Therefore utility is tied directly to the necessary resolution of ‘doubt’ encountered in the life of human subjects. For Dewey the emphasis for pragmatists is not on the revealing of ‘Truth,’ but on the development of meaningful understandings about the world that assist in the attainment of goals.

**Peirce, Inquiry and Scientific Communities**

Peirce was and remains a significant figure in the Pragmatic tradition and formulated the famous maxim which concludes that ‘...our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects.’\(^{117}\) The pragmatic definition of ideas can include those that direct our conduct, so that an idea of ‘truth’ has direct and practical implications for the subject of that idea, depending on how the idea is conceptualised. From this it follows that a scientist’s idea of truth guides the epistemological basis of her work and the way that she goes about her truth finding. This idea would fundamentally differ from an artist’s idea of truth, and so would the methods an artist might use in doing the work of truth finding (though there are some salient similarities). I have already described the close relationship between the natural sciences, philosophical naturalism and pragmatism. It is not surprising then that Peirce was particularly interested in the methods with which the scientific community developed its knowledge. His work on science, scientific communities and their operation is important, both in the development of pragmatism generally as well as its consequent influence on P4C. I will first explain the regard he held for the scientific method and then describe the importance Peirce placed on the fact of this method’s situatedness in communities of inquiry.

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Peirce describes four types of reason and the motivation for its employment in *The Fixation of Belief*.\(^{118}\) He first establishes the condition under which reason is to be employed, which he describes as the human need to move from doubt (an uncomfortable sense of uncertainty) to belief (which is assured and action guiding). Doubt is felt when an experienced event cannot be subsumed into pre-existing schemas of understanding or known universal laws of behaviour; schemas and laws that had, previous to the event, been predictive and explanatory in quality. This agrees with the general idea of pragmatic philosophy that concerns itself solely with subjects’ experience of problems in their own world. Peirce describes the process of thinking and the need for movement as *inquiry*. The inquiring subject is faced with choices of reasoning behaviour, three of which can have some (immediate at least) efficacy in moving the inquirer away from doubt towards the realm of knowledge.

Peirce’s preferred type of reasoning is *scientific*, as he saw that it dealt only with ‘...Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them.’\(^{119}\) His privileging of the methods of science, above the other forms of reasoning he describes, rests on this premise of realism. Peirce’s conviction in a real world, along with his certainty that science is best able to explain this world, led him to investigate the development of knowledge in scientific communities. He believed that the striving for truth was a social pursuit, and that only through the structured interactions exemplified by the inquiring community could truth be found. He further believed that this notion of truth demanded of community members certain personal behaviours and standards of practice. From his idea of truth he was able to extrapolate social and moral theories as well. He describes this ideal method below.

‘...investigators, instead of condemning each the work of most of the others as misdirected from beginning to end, cooperate, stand on one another’s shoulders, and multiply incontestable results; where every observation is repeated, and isolated observations go for little; where every hypothesis that merits attention is subjected to severe but fair examination, and only after the predictions to which it leads have been remarkably borne out by experience is trusted at all, and even then only provisionally; where a radically false step is rarely taken, even the most faulty of those theories which gain wide credence being true in their main experiential predictions.’\(^{120}\)

In this quote, practically every aspiration and requirement Peirce holds for the human search for truth is represented. We can read of the need for cooperative research undertaken within self-critical communities, the scientific method as the ideal paradigm of inquiry, the contingency of scientific facts, and the fallibility of this method as necessitating enduring and

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\(^{119}\) Ibid.

cumulative inquiry. What is particularly interesting about this quote however is that Peirce is describing the method by which he believes philosophy should be studied. Previous to this quote he says he is ‘...intent upon rescuing it [philosophy] therefrom and bringing it to a condition like that of the natural sciences...’\textsuperscript{121} after which this description begins. Peirce also believed that the method of the sciences had wider applications. We have already read that he believed philosophy would be best served by using a scientific approach. This has certainly proved to be the case in the analytic tradition, where ‘...it mimics the scientific style of inquiry, which proposes hypotheses and theories, tests them in the light of data, and aims at widespread discussion and control by the peers.’\textsuperscript{122} But Peirce held that the method would have practical benefits as well for non-specialists in the solution of their everyday problems—the problems of which it should be remembered are always the concern of the pragmatists. So when Peirce writes that ‘[l]ogicality in regard to practical matters (if this be understood, not in the old sense, but as consisting in a wise union of security with fruitfulness of reasoning) is the most useful quality an animal can possess...,’\textsuperscript{123} he is stating that the method of science, with its reliance on reasoned conclusions based on sensible knowledge and valid arguments, is one that belongs equally in the field of common experience as well as the experimental laboratory. It is from this collation of beliefs that Peirce coined the phrase ‘community of inquiry,’ which Lipman later appropriated for his own work. Dewey more immediately developed these ideas and their implications for education.

**Dewey, Democracy and Method**

The essentials of method are therefore identical with the essentials of reflection. They are first that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience—that there be a continuous activity in which he is interested for its own sake; secondly, that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; third, that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; fourth, that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; fifth, that he have opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity.\textsuperscript{124}

When Dewey said that the crisis in democracy necessitates for its solution the use of the scientific method, he based his hypothesis on the fact that the method itself is neutral to any

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief”,
specific purposes. Because of its neutrality, the scientific method, Dewey explained, is preeminently suited for serving democratic ends.\textsuperscript{125}

Dewey believed humans to be a part of nature, rather than apart from it, and he believed that it was interactions with the natural world, and the problems it posed, that shaped humans’ lives and beliefs. The world provided the context in which problem or doubt was encountered, and it is a human’s situatedness in this world that motivates the need for resolution. This meant a rejection of metaphysical rationalism, and a particular target of Dewey’s was always the effect that its corollaries (particularly Cartesian dualism) had on education in schools and thought generally. He did not believe that such distanced speculation was able to provide humans with meaningful knowledge, the measure of which was its practical effects in resolving problems. As might be expected of a committed pragmatist, Dewey developed an early commitment to ‘...the philosophy of experimentalism or instrumentalism—experimental in its commitment to scientific procedures as a general method of inquiry in all fields, including ethics, and instrumental in its treatment of ideas as plans of actions, instruments for the resolution of problems.'\textsuperscript{126} In this then he was no different to his pragmatic colleagues Peirce and James, and through his work on the logic of inquiry maintained, with Peirce, a belief in the universal efficacy of the scientific method.

Dewey’s commitment to both experimentation and education can be seen in his establishment of the University Elementary School where ‘[t]he educational philosophy of the school was rooted in key premises of Dewey’s philosophy and psychology... that school is a microcosm of society, and that that the process of education is, or should be, simply a more controlled process of growth in society that all humans have always experienced.'\textsuperscript{127} Dewey was a powerful advocate of progressivism in education and it is therefore important that a thorough description of the relevant aspects of his philosophy, as well as an analysis of its influences on education, is conducted. Dewey’s commitment to democracy, for example, underpins his thinking on education and philosophy more broadly. He is a democrat for the very pragmatic reason that, ‘...it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience [and] is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.'\textsuperscript{128} Democracy therefore results in the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens, as he believed its structures demanded that the interests of all participants are taken into account.


\textsuperscript{126} Skilbeck, \textit{John Dewey}, 2.


when decisions concerning their livelihood are made. Dewey also thought that students should learn and engage in the process of inquiry, and that education proper was in fact involvement in this process and the application of its method. In his various works on education Dewey describes the importance of developing thinking skills in the minds of students. These skills were not designed for their own purposes per se, but to improve the various contributions thinking people could make to democratic societies.

Dewey’s second commitment in his educational theory is to that of growth through experience. His naturalism led him to see all humans as part of nature and subject to those same elementary forces, one of which is development over time. Education, rather than trying to interrupt this growth, through inauthentic pedagogical strategies or the provision of a curriculum that is merely preparation for adulthood, should engage with students in a child-centered manner. For Dewey, all authentic growth and consequent knowledge begins in experience, and he spends some time developing his concept of experience across his several works on education. An experience must be primarily a conscious and active event in a human’s life, which requires interaction, thought and reflection. Dewey describes it as follows:

> When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us: such is the peculiar combination.\(^\text{129}\)

So experience for Dewey cannot be, for example, the passive reproduction of thought or the memorisation of facts (such as in traditional education), as these two activities lack the critical motive of action on the agent’s behalf, as well as the reaction of the ‘thing’ acted upon. Neither does the going about of one’s business in a way that reproduces prior understanding account for Dewey’s experience, as there is no deliberation upon the object of experience, and there is no consideration of the results of behaviour in reflection. There are good and bad experiences however, even while both might manifest the qualities of interaction desired, ‘[h]ence the central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences.’\(^\text{130}\) Good experience for Dewey, of the type that is educative in the longer term, is one that is utilised in future interactions with the environment and inspires further qualitatively valuable learning. Experience in this sense also is always dependent on a problem of some description, as for Dewey it is illogical to act on a thing unless it challenges current understanding. This challenge to understanding then results in the thinking that for Dewey only takes place during experience, and is brought to bear on the dissonant situation. Thinking makes connections

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 139.  
between actions and reactions, and creates the intellectual network that accounts for observations:

Thinking, in other words, is the intentional endeavour to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous... The occurrence is now understood; it is explained; it is reasonable, as we say, that the thing should happen as it does.\(^{131}\)

It is important in terms of Dewey’s pragmatism that the origins of experience and consequent thought lie within the experiencer’s immediate realm of involvement in the world. The thinking involved then is not theoretical in an abstract sense, but towards problems of practical significance that require attention and resolution. It is also equally important that this resolution is contingent and fallible. The solution should be seen in terms of ‘warrant’ and ‘justification’ rather than ‘Truth,’ with the latter for Dewey suggesting the dualism of theory and action that was always his intellectual target.

Dewey is clear about the way a thinker should go about the task of developing solutions to the problems found in experience. For Dewey there was a readily available method that could be used which finds its origins the natural sciences:

The stimulus to thinking is found when we wish to determine the significance of some act, performed or to be performed. Then we anticipate consequences... The projection of consequences means a proposed or tentative solution. To perfect this hypothesis, existing conditions have to be carefully scrutinized and the implications of the hypothesis developed—an operation called reasoning. Then the suggested solution—the idea or theory—has to be tested by acting upon it. If it brings about certain consequences, certain determinate changes, in the world, it is accepted as valid. Otherwise it is modified, and another trial made.\(^{132}\)

The act of thinking begins with ‘stimulus’, and then moves to the development of a speculative ‘hypothesis’, which results in a ‘theory’ that requires ‘testing’ for confirmation or modification that results in a ‘solution’. So whether we consider the student playing with a toy that will not function in the way he wants it to, or the adult who is stuck on the problem of disciplining an unruly class, each of these problems can be resolved (for Dewey) using the scientific method of theory development, testing and careful observation. Pring agrees that Dewey’s experience and its corollary in thinking, “…has the overtones of Dewey’s understanding of scientific method; ‘experience’ contains elements of experimentation.”\(^{133}\) Dewey’s commitment to the natural sciences always reveals itself both in the language he uses and the fact of his procedural account of the way in which the humans overcomes difficulties in their lives. Along

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\(^{131}\) Democracy and Education : An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, 146.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 151.

with this he writes that ‘[m]ethod is not antithetical to subject matter; it is the effective
direction of subject matter to desired results.’ This suggests an allowance within method for
some flexibility of application but what exactly this mean in practical terms Dewey does not
say. Irrespective of this allowance, there is still talk of direction and results in his caveat that
mandates a particular orientation to experience and problem solving that is very much
methodical in nature.

The Socratic Method

While the pragmatists ably present P4C with philosophical justifications for its subjects of
concern (human experience) and methods of inquiry (based on the natural sciences), there
remains the requirement for a figure that both models the philosophical disposition, as well as
a manner by which pragmatic philosophy can be enacted in the classroom. I have said that
Lipman found his model in the figure of Socrates, and there are a range of good reasons why
he is a good fit for P4C and pragmatic inquiry. We have seen first of all that pragmatic inquiry
must necessarily be logical and methodical in nature, and that inquiry must take on a
particular direction. In reflecting this ideal Pang writes that,

Socrates engaged in asking questions and answering questions with questions (a dialectic
method of inquiry). Its original purpose was to develop skills to identify and challenge
underlying assumptions so that people could examine their belief structure in the context of
their analysis of knowledge. As a result, the concept of critical thinking grounded in logic
emerged from this type of inquiry.

From this description we can see how well this interpretation of Socrates’ pedagogical practice
suits the philosophical foundations and intentions of P4C. We have in Socrates a
constructivist—a teacher who believes that his students should develop their own
understandings of concepts through dialogue. In this, the teacher acts as a guide and critical
partner in the learning process, and presents problematic material to students for discussion
and experimentation. Rather than providing answers, the Socratic constructivist conducts
students along a rational pathway towards logical conclusions. In this we have another
important collaboration between Socrates, Dewey and Lipman, in that they all see knowledge
as something to be obtained through rational and logical means, whether that be through
dialogue that is tested according to its rational content, or through experimentalism that
adheres to the logical steps and conclusions of science.

135 Katherine Pang, "Sophist or Socratic Teaching Methods in Fostering Learning in Us Graduate Education,"
It was from science of course that Dewey appropriated his belief in method, and here again we can find an equivalent in Socrates. Boghossian observes that ‘[t]he presupposition of the Socratic method is that there is a truth of the matter and that that truth can be known through discourse, or, more specifically, through the elenetic process.’\textsuperscript{136} For truth in the pragmatic sense we can read ‘practical discovery’ or ‘knowledge that resolves a problem in experience,’ and see that for Socrates, as much as for Dewey, there are a particular set of steps that needs be followed in order to arrive at useful knowledge. While there might be alternative readings of the Socratic method (which will be discussed below), for now, in reading both Dewey and P4C materials, we can agree that for them ‘...Socrates asks particular \textit{kinds} of questions, in a particular \textit{order and manner}, and with particular \textit{aims} in mind.’\textsuperscript{137} In P4C this ‘particular aim’ is rational agreement amongst interlocutors in the CoI about the normative content of the concept under discussion. This direction results in a product that is the defined concept, and Lipman (as we have seen from above) is clear about this intention in the P4C inquiry process.

Redfield expands on the Socratic method by describing it as

...the \textit{elenchus}, the process of refutation by which the student is convinced that he does not know what he thought he knew, that he cannot defend whatever received opinions he carries about with him.\textsuperscript{138}

This process of refutation, which supervenes on the speculative hypothesis that must necessarily have preceded it, is markedly similar again to the scientific method, and again describes how appropriate Socrates is to pragmatic philosophising. Rud further expands on this process as being

...characterized by asking for reasons for any assertion; examining those reasons to see if they are consistent and make sense; and looking for counterexamples, all as a means to providing a definition of a term that will withstand scrutiny. In short, find what is common in discrete instances in order to determine a rule.\textsuperscript{135}

In science the purpose of the scientific community is to, as much as generate new theories, critically engage with the work of others in an attempt to challenge and refute this work. Just as the \textit{elenchus} works primarily with logic and the counter-example, so to can science seek through experimentation to find that result which disproves a theory. So in the typical P4C

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\textsuperscript{136} Peter Boghossian, "Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Socratic Pedagogy," \textit{Educational Philosophy and Theory}, 38, no. 6 (2006): 716; ibid.
\end{flushright}
dialogue we will see the teacher inviting his students to present their ideas, which the community members will try to both affirm and critique. In the above quote we can see how Socrates presents to Lipman one further facet of the philosophical inquirer that I alluded to in my introduction. In Socrates ’...there is the ideal of appreciating the extent of one’s own ignorance, the respects in which one’s current knowledge and understanding are subject to profound limitations.’ In this, philosophers of all persuasions might surely find agreement, but it is particularly germane for the pragmatic philosopher. For her, Dewey tells us, thought (and surely philosophy) cannot happen without experience, and experience only occurs in the problematic situation. For Lipman as well philosophy can only happen when students are confronted with their own ‘ignorance’ about an idea, and this ignorance is the beginning of philosophical thought.

**Philosophical Hermeneutics**

I will now move onto an examination of philosophical hermeneutics and, according to hermeneutic practice, develop a brief historical understanding of its development from early scriptural practice through to its engagement with contemporary pragmatism. In doing so I am borrowing from a reading of the main streams of hermeneutic philosophy, all of which place Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and finally Gadamer as the key figures in its development. I will be particularly concentrating on the work of Gadamer as the key thinker in my description of hermeneutic philosophy, and examine his responses to his predecessors as an entry point into his own philosophy. In the final sections of this chapter I will discuss a critical engagement with Gadamer’s hermeneutics by Rorty, a contemporary pragmatic philosopher.

**Hermeneutics Before Gadamer**

Hermeneutics has historical precedents that stretch back to the work of Plato and Aristotle in philosophy, and on through Augustine, Aquinas and Martin Luther, the latter three of whom developed and applied hermeneutic principles to the interpretation of the Bible and other religious writings. Gadamer, Heidegger and Dilthey each acknowledge however Augustine’s writing in particular as significant in that ‘...it is Augustine who first introduces the universality-claim of hermeneutics [which] arises from the connection Augustine establishes between language and interpretation, but also from his claim that interpretation of Scripture involves a deeper, existential level of self-understanding.’ This early claim to both the necessity of the

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hermeneutical circle, and the situatedness of the human subject in a linguistic culture, is significant for the philosophical hermeneutics of these philosophers.

Schleiermacher and the Hermeneutic Circle

An important aspect of Schleiermacher's broader philosophical program as it relates to his hermeneutics is philosophy's need to overcome the various dualisms that had plagued philosophy of mind and epistemology. The various attempts to explain our knowledge of a world external to the mind had always eventually suffered from sceptical attacks: How is it that we can be sure that our intellectual knowledge of the world in fact accurately represents the world as it is? Any fruitful attempt to do so would require a vantage point that would transcend the conceptual and schematic subjectivity of our own minds. Such a position however is incoherent, in that it requires a stance free of the subjectivity that is the necessary condition of understanding. Schleiermacher sought alternative theories with which to explain our understanding of the world. He related the problem to that of the objective rules of language and its ability to describe our subjectivity. If we are to look at the way a child learns to speak it appears an impossible task—how can one learn to speak according to the rules of language without first having a grasp of these rules. And surely to understand language one must have already grasped the rules in the first place in order to use them. Looked at in this way the process of language acquisition seems circular and presents us with the same dilemma we have when looking for a starting point for knowledge. Schleiermacher's response to these problems was the universal nature of hermeneutics. For him the fact that we do understand something of the world already lies in our practical engagement with it 'and an 'Aristotelian' insistence upon the ontological primacy of what we do before the ways in which we try to explain what we do.' For Schleiermacher, and it is for this move he is generally acknowledged, understanding is not something we only do when reading a text, but is something that is always going on whatever the context. Interpretation is the basic way in which we come to know and understand the world. Bowie understands this move as follows:

The hermeneutic tradition can, in contrast, actually be defined by its acceptance of an inherent circularity in understanding, because there is in its terms no way of escaping the need to have already understood something before attempting to explain understanding: this is precisely the point of the 'hermeneutic circle.'

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143 Ibid., 111.
The search for the rules of absolute knowledge and objectivity is a search for foundations, or a certain starting point, from which all knowledge can be justified. The rejection of the possibility of foundations however underpins hermeneutics generally (as well as many strands of contemporary philosophy). Schleiermacher’s analogy of language acquisition when applied to knowledge more generally demonstrates that he too had made the conceptual movement that says *understanding always supervenes on understanding* and that this relationship is necessarily circular.

*Dilthey and the Method of the Social Sciences*

Dilthey’s development of a hermeneutics was a direct response to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and the epistemological program it set out for the natural sciences and the extent of knowledge more generally. However, in opposition to Kant’s categories, Dilthey’s ‘...new critique, while following the critical imperative of Kant, would seek to ground the truth of the individual human sciences in the actual terms of the social and historical reality.’\(^{144}\) So while admiring their utility in the natural world, he recognised that the Kantian categories were not appropriate for understanding humans and their historical situation. Historical knowledge was, for Dilthey, knowledge of the lives of humans. He required a method that could secure and justify this knowledge against sceptical attacks, in particular from adherents of the natural sciences. Dilthey summed up his approach as follows:

> The human studies rest on the relationship between experience, expression and understanding. So their development depends as much on the depth of experience as on the increasing revelation of its content; it is also conditioned by the spread of understanding over all objective manifestations of mind and by the increasingly complete and methodical extraction of the mental content from different expressions.\(^{145}\)

There are three key concepts here that Dilthey developed and relied upon in his methodology. Dilthey develops the concept of *experience* as it relates to an individual. He views experience as the elementary unit in an historical whole and so is careful to delineate its ambit, as it is so important to his method overall. Dilthey characterises it as a type of consciousness that ‘...is one with its content just as subjectivity is one with its subject; the experience is not an object which confronts the person who has it, its existence for me cannot be distinguished from what is presented to me...’\(^{146}\) *Expression* then is an equally important concept in Dilthey’s method as

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\(^{146}\) Ibid., 184.
it provides the ‘...manifestations of mental content...’\textsuperscript{147} for the scientist to examine. Dilthey was not so much interested in an historical subject’s conscious reflection or introspection (which he saw as unreliable), but rather in those responses to situations that mirrored the mental experience. He believed that ‘...expressions can contain more of the psychological context than any introspection can discover, they lift it from the depths which consciousness does not illuminate,’\textsuperscript{148} and that their access was necessary for the human scientist to perform his interpretive work.

The last of the three significant concepts in the method Dilthey outlined above is \textit{understanding}, which he saw as the human scientist’s key methodological faculty, one that contrasted with natural science’s emphasis on \textit{knowledge}. For science, humanity as an object of investigation is reduced to a collection of facts derived from the senses that are explained in terms of objective natural laws. Such knowledge however manifestly fails to explain the historical and subjective experience of life, and can hardly give meaning to those manifestations of human experience that are the objects of the human science investigator. For Dilthey humanity ‘...only becomes the subject-matter of the human sciences when we experience human states, give expressions to them and understand these expressions.’\textsuperscript{149} This means that understanding on the part of the human scientist requires that she herself is a \textit{participant in the everyday life of humans}, that she is a part of the situation from which the life-expression is produced, and that she uses her own experience along with that of the life-expression, to develop knowledge about herself and life-expression.

Palmer agrees with Bollnow when he says that ‘...along with the conception of the unity of life and expression, the conception of historicality is central to understanding Dilthey.’\textsuperscript{150} In order for humans to understand themselves it is necessary for them to reflect on themselves not just as beings of a certain moment in time, but as beings who have been shaped by both their personal and cultural history, and as beings who have a future in which to manifest this reflection in their ongoing existence. The other corollary of this is that humans do not have a fixed essence in the same way that natural objects do, as this historicity has neither a beginning nor an end. This leads us to the centrality of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle for Dilthey. For Schlieirmacher, hermeneutics was still a method for the interpretation of linguistic texts, while he did recognise the significance of a text’s cultural

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Selected Writings}, 175.

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situation. Dilthey however extends this hermeneutic insight to the realm of human historical experience more generally. He writes that ‘[i]n time life exists in the relation of parts to a whole, that is, as a context.’\(^{151}\) So with the recognition that life is time, he situates humans in history and sees them as being products and producers of this history. Human existence itself is an aspect of a hermeneutic circle whereby humans play the bit parts in a history that is constantly being interpreted by them. This interpretation needs the context of history as well for it to be cogent. The result of a properly hermeneutic investigation for Dilthey was not only a learned explication of the text in the author’s own terms. It was, further to this, an analytic of cultural products more generally that, with the benefit of historical experience and insight, could shed light more generally on human experience and existence by reference to the mind as manifested in these products.

**Heidegger, Facticity and Unconcealment**

For Heidegger, his Husserl-inspired phenomenology was also to be description of objects in human experience, but with a series of different assumptions that underpinned the possibilities and goals of knowledge. In this he saw himself as the progenitor of a new type of philosophising, the goal of which was *aletheia*, or the unconcealment of entities, in order to allow their intelligibility to be understood. Through Heidegger’s version of philosophy the inquirer could ‘...let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.’\(^{152}\) Objects present themselves to us in myriad ways, but for Heidegger there was an original or immediate presentation of objects as such that their utility and meaningfulness could be demonstrated as being the fact of their being. This value was central to the investigation he undertook into fundamental ontology—the being of *Dasein*, or human *being-in-the-world*.

In his analysis of *Dasein*, Heidegger presents a series of claims about the *being* of humans. The first of these claims is that the hermeneutic circle is *Dasein*’s basic existential condition, that humans have always already interpreted the world around them pre-reflectively, and that they are always in the process of doing so. It is a condition without beginnings or foundations. Heidegger demands that this circularity ‘...is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing.’\(^{153}\) The influence of Dilthey’s thought on Heidegger here is evident, in that he takes from him the universality of the

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\(^{151}\) Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, 233.


\(^{153}\) Ibid., 195.
hermeneutic circle as it was once applied only to texts, and agrees that it is a basic element of Dasein’s facticity—‘...a fundamental categorical determination of human existence.’\textsuperscript{154} For Heidegger, the recognition of the virtuous character of the circle marks out the groundwork of what philosophy should be. He summarised his shift then from fundamental ontology to interpretation as follows:

In explaining the tasks of ontology we found it necessary that there should be a fundamental ontology taking as its theme that entity which is ontologico-ontically distinctive, Dasein, in order to confront the cardinal problem—the question of the meaning of Being in general. Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation.\textsuperscript{155}

The starting point is that Dasein is an interpreting being whose being is an issue for itself, and that this fact alone marks it out as something ontologically separate from the world of non-human objects. Given this distinction, traditional realms of knowledge and tools of philosophy (particularly science and rationalism), each of which are foundational in their own ways, flounder in their attempt to come to grips with the historical interpreting being that Dasein is, as well as the objects of its interpretations. These traditional approaches reflect their own methodological and ontological preconceptions rather than illuminate the unique character of Dasein in its dealings with the world. To the interpretive being that Dasein is, objects present themselves in two manners. One is that of present-to-hand, whereby the object is understood as something with fixed qualities as thematised in intelligible consciousness. The second is by that mode of interpretation we use when engaging with objects in the doing of the personal projects that are the manifestations of our existence and future-projections:

That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, its usability, and its detrimentality. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorial whole of a possible interconnection of the ready-to-hand.\textsuperscript{156}

The object, for example a hammer, is not of a weight, dimension and materiality that is the concern of a disengaged spectator. In its ready-to-hand mode it has instead the utility of an instrument that can be used in the construction of a house that protects one from the weather. In this Hoy recognises that ‘...the characteristics of the tools come into being in the concrete interpretation manifested in the activity of using them.’\textsuperscript{157} It is only when they are


\textsuperscript{155} Heidegger, Being and Time, 61.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 184.

used expressly for the manifestation of Dasein’s purposes that they have the interpretive value that Heidegger believes is revealed through phenomenological inquiry.

With this in mind, one can examine the outcome of inquiry in an attempt to illuminate its methodology. Heidegger writes that

The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call "interpretation". In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.158

It seems impossibly circular, but we remember that Heidegger describes this circularity as virtuous. For him the purpose of inquiry is to arrive at understandings of entities that rest on an understanding of the understanding entity that is Dasein. The work results in a further development of both the interpretive faculties of the inquirer as well as the unconcealing, or bringing into light, of the uses of objects that humans encounter in the world. These discoveries are made known to the inquirer in what Heidegger calls interpretations, which are our elementary ways of knowing and going about our projects. So we have as the product of inquiry an interpretation of an entity. But what does this look like and how are we to judge its correctness? It seems already evident that we cannot ascribe to it the value that we give a mathematical demonstration, which we can describe as true or false, or a scientific proof, which we can describe in similar terms. An interpretation is something qualitatively different both in its product as well as its object. It is surely possible as well that we can say that some interpretations are incorrect or untrue, as without this possibility irrationalism would reign.

Hoy observes that, in encountering this problem, ‘Heidegger invokes such contrasting normative terms as authentic or inauthentic, genuine or not genuine, and transparent or opaque.’159 So it is still possible to speak about an inquiry with reference to its viability by using a language different to the natural sciences but that still contains the values of rationality and reason. These no longer rest however on the epistemological values of naturalism but lie in assertions expressed in language that seek to disclose entities. This is not the truth of correspondence, where an assertion can be made about the world that accurately mirrors that world. Nor is it the truth of coherence, where claims hang together in a theoretical schema.

We return then to the concept of aletheia. For Heidegger, phenomenology’s aim is of world-disclosure, to bring to the light the being of entities, and for him this must always be expressed in language. This perhaps is the most important idea developed by Gadamer in his work on understanding.

158 Heidegger, Being and Time, 188-89.
159 Hoy, “Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn,” 181.
Gadamer and Interpretation

In his Part III of his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, Gadamer formulates his philosophy of hermeneutic experience as a response to, and development of, his hermeneutic predecessors. It is important though to recognise Part I, where he examines art’s relation to truth, and Part III, which he make clear his ontological shift to language as the medium of hermeneutic understanding. In Part II, the focus of my work, Gadamer articulates a comprehensive theory of experience that begins in Dilthey’s hermeneutic circle and Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*, and arrives at Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis* as practical wisdom. Gadamer presents much of this work as a response to his hermeneutic predecessors.

Gadamer’s Criticisms

Schleiermacher has been subject to criticism for his psychologism and the over-privileging of artistic intent inherent in his hermeneutics. While such a role for the interpreter may have its benefits, Gadamer sees a weakness in this position as well and writes

> His hermeneutics, in fact, had in mind texts whose authority was undisputed... Its goal was the exact understanding of particular texts, which was to be aided by the universality of historical contexts. This is Schleiermacher’s limitation...  

Gadamer faults Schleiermacher for a historical relativism of sorts that does not seek not to create a dialogue amongst interpreters and texts of different cultural or historical horizons. He sees in Schleiermacher the belief that once the job of objective understanding is completed, an understanding that is entirely circumscribed by the *author’s* own original historical horizon, the job of interpretation is complete. By this definition Gadamer criticises this hermeneutics as a subservient encounter rather than a critical engagement that seeks agreement. There is neither a requirement that the interpreter consider her own historical situation when seeking understanding, nor that she looks for consonance and dissonance in the encounter of the two situations. Another related distinction between Gadamer’s and Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics is one that is also critical for the development of Gadamer’s own philosophy. At the root of their difference as well is Gadamer’s belief that ‘[w]hen we try to understand a text, we do not place ourselves in the author’s inner state; rather, if one wants to speak of placing ourselves, we place ourselves in his point of view.’ In psychological interpretation the author’s state and intentions are seen as a ‘given’ and the goal of hermeneutic practice is to obtain an objective interpretation that recognises the author’s historical situation. The *truth-value* of the

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text escapes a critical engagement, any meaningful claims it might make are left unchallenged in the interpretive process, and any meaningful contributions it might make to the interpreter’s life are left uninvestigated.

In Dilthey, Gadamer also sees an evident contradiction between Dilthey’s belief in objective knowledge and his own belief in the historical situation of human existence. If the contemporary human scientist is to find categories of understanding within life itself, surely these categories are just as much a product of his life as that example of objective mind under investigation. Yet Dilthey believed himself immune to the distortions of contingency through his claims to historical consciousness. To this Gadamer poses the following question:

What is the special virtue of historical consciousness – by contrast to all other forms of consciousness in history – that its own relativity does not endanger the fundamental claim to objective knowledge?¹⁶²

There are two significant objections that Gadamer makes here. Dilthey is first of all unable to say how it is that the human scientist is free from the historicity that he describes as the existential situation of all other humans. Gadamer finds that ‘...historical consciousness is ultimately a utopian ideal, containing an internal contradiction...’¹⁶³ Gadamer’s second objection relates to the importance Dilthey places on lived-experience as the basis of a human science. The benefit for Dilthey in the attainment of historical consciousness was to be found in the possibility of attaining an objective stance, much in the same way a natural scientist can lay claim to the same. So where on one hand Dilthey saw a connection between life, expression and understanding (an understanding that required life), he also demanded of the human scientist a reduction of that life in which the human scientist was embedded, but by his own definition was also required to properly fulfil his task. Gadamer observes that ‘[t]his ambiguity has its ultimate foundation in an inner disunity of his thought... His epistemological reflections on the basis of the human sciences are not really compatible with his starting from life philosophy.’¹⁶⁴ He is not drawing our attention to the similarity between Dilthey and Kant this time, but Dilthey and Descartes, who similarly saw his own subjectivity as a spoil to knowledge.

Gadamer accepts Heidegger’s analysis of the facticity of Dasein; in its thrownness into a world that has already been interpreted, and its ineluctable orientation towards interpreting this world via its interactions. He writes

¹⁶² *Truth and Method*, 228.
¹⁶³ Ibid., 225.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 231.
The problem of hermeneutics becomes universal in scope, even attaining a new dimension, through his [Heidegger’s] transcendental interpretation of understanding. The interpreter’s belonging to his object... now acquires a concretely demonstrable significance, and it is the task of hermeneutics to demonstrate it.  

From this Gadamer sees the role of philosophical hermeneutics not just as a method of textual exegesis, or historical research, but as a program that seeks to explain the possibility of all interpretive work that humans do. The transcendental status Gadamer gives to hermeneutics demonstrates the significance with which he views the continuation of the program he inherited from his forbears. He agrees that humans are temporal beings in the way they are shaped by historical forces that form the world view from which interpretation takes place, and that their actions in the now are future oriented. He also agrees that the work of art is a claim to truth and a source of the same, in that the artist can create in such a way that the work speaks to us and reveals our being with the world. Heidegger, in discussing the painting of a pair of peasant shoes for example, observes that such is the revealing nature of the artist’s understanding of the equipment value of the shoes that, ‘[t]he artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth.’ Gadamer finally agrees that ‘truth is an event that happens in the encounter with the thing in language... an event of revealing that, at the same time, conceals.’ This act of un concealment in language, that takes place by way of the phenomenological gaze, reminds us of Heidegger’s finding truth in aletheia. Gadamer however contests many significant aspects of Heidegger’s hermeneutics in the development of his own unique philosophy. In particular he came to see truth not as a flash of inspiration but as an event that took its own time in revealing and un concealing. He also turned away from a philosophising that was a commune with the Gods, towards one that was dialogical and required a solidarity and relationship with those in the present.

Hermeneutic Experience

In contrast to his predecessors, Dostal sees Gadamer’s original contributions as,

... the rehabilitation of authority and tradition, the reliance on the concepts of the hermeneutical circle (an age-old hermeneutical concept that Heidegger too takes up), play, effective-historical consciousness, the fusion of horizons, and the identification of the understanding with the Aristotelian virtue phronesis, practical reason.

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165 Ibid., 254.
168 Ibid., 253.
Gadamer, as we shall see, is always conscious of the situation that humans occupy and is consistent in his application of this idea to his own work. While his contributions were original, they are equally an amalgam of interpretations of historical ideas. For Gadamer this is both practical, in that he sees traditional texts as sources of truth, and necessary, in that given our historicity we cannot shake the influence of our past. What is interesting about Dostal’s list is that the contributions he has highlighted are effectively a summary of the concepts in the chapter called *Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience*, in which Gadamer explicates their meanings and applications in detail. The sum of these ideas account for a theory of experience and interpretation that explains what happens to us, consciously or not, in our encounters with culture. They also, and more importantly, suggest what we *should do* when encountering the other and make a claim of understanding. We will see that in their empirical application *Gadamer’s concept of experience is substantially different to that of Dewey’s*, and that this will make for an equally different philosophical practice.

It is clear that Gadamer’s most important development lay in his concept of *effective history*, as without this there is no possibility of any of the aspects of his authentic hermeneutic experience. For Gadamer, ‘...effective history means the relation of past and present in which the past constitutively determines the present through an interplay by bringing its tradition to bear upon it.’\(^{169}\) Given the fact that humans are all enclosed in a world of culture and history, one that both forms and is formed by them, there is no entry point as such, and no possibility that one can be immune to the forces of history. For Gadamer this is a universal condition of being-in-the-world, and awareness of this fact (historical effective *consciousness*) is the first requirement of anyone seeking hermeneutic experience. Given the necessary conclusion from this fact, that we are historical and are continuing to be so, it denies human being the essence we ascribe to the naturalised objects of science. Thus we are always in a state of becoming and so ‘[t]he illumination of this situation—reflection on effective history—can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due... to the essence of the historical being that we are.’\(^{170}\) Accordingly Gadamer presents us with specific conceptual understandings as well as ongoing challenges that form the basis of hermeneutic experience.

\(^{170}\) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301.
Prejudice, Tradition and Authority

Gadamer re-conceptualises prejudice, a word that today has the very clear implications of hasty or unbalanced thinking, but which for Gadamer was a necessary condition of all interpretation. If we return to the idea of the hermeneutic circle, we remember that humans already have sets of beliefs that enable them to interpret the world, and that they are enclosed in this circle of understanding. Gadamer sees these beliefs as prejudices, but in a positive light, in that we use them to come to understanding by their application in our worldly pursuits. This means ‘...the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the world, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.’\(^{171}\)

Therefore the belief that ‘men are equal to women’ is for Gadamer a prejudice, and for us a productive prejudice. In this Gadamer accepts that prejudices can be incorrect. So without the faculty of prejudice we would be ‘blind’ to existence as we know it, but equally we can be ignorant if our prejudices are incorrect. Gadamer’s other significant contribution in the same light is the weight he gives to tradition as sources of truth, as well as his rehabilitation of the idea of authority; both of which were discredited by the Enlightenment in an era that saw institutions (such as the church and state) as inimical to reason and free will. For Gadamer, much is lost if one rejects out of hand the values and knowledge that can be found in classic texts and institutions.

Davey suggests, ‘[t]radition as conceived by philosophical hermeneutics is not just a stock of inert ideas or values but a manner or style of becoming critically engaged with... the influence of a set of questions or subject matters.’\(^{172}\) It is correct to say that any encounter with tradition must be critical, but I think that Gadamer writes of tradition as containing claims to truth that are more than ideas or questions. It is important to recognise however in what sense Gadamer insisted on the preservation of tradition, and what he meant when he wrote that, ‘[i]t needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change.’\(^{173}\) It is clear that this statement may be taken prima facie as the conservative desire to see the past as an immutable set of values and valorise them as such. For Gadamer though any encounter must be dialogical, therefore ‘[p]reservation is not to be confused with conservation of a natural reality... Preservation has primarily to do with holding open.’\(^{174}\) He believed that traditional texts had stood the test of time for the good reason that they continued to provoke in us, if approached in a critical manner, reflection on our

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\(^{171}\) Truth and Method, 282.


\(^{174}\) Risser, Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics, 73.
prejudices. It is a hermeneutic demand then that we should act as advocates of these texts and their horizons.

Gadamer offers a related critique of the rejection of authority that rests again on the viability of truth claims by authoritative figures, rather than traditional texts. It is correct to acknowledge that one must be wary of the potential forces that may be at play when a more powerful figure makes demands on us, as they may be ideological and without our best interests in mind. To reject all authority, however, runs the risk of taking things to the extreme whereby we absent from our thinking the worth of the authority’s claim to knowledge. For Gadamer the out-of-hand rejection of authority is an irrational act, and one that might fly in the face of the Enlightenment’s belief in reason. Instead he observes that

...authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. 175

It is the act of a rational person to recognise the fact that an authority may have superior knowledge, judgment and skills in the area of one’s personal pursuits, and that the recognition of such can be beneficial in the development of our own prejudices. Witness the role of the teacher who imparts knowledge after some years of training and has developed expertise in her methods and subject matter. In this case the practitioner does not enter the classroom with already extant authority, though she is in the position to quickly claim as much by weight of her official position and her students’ expectations. Before authority is earned, certain aspects of her practice must be exhibited to her students so that they confer upon her the status of a teacher, and consequently her position of authority. By being made aware of their lack of knowledge and skill, students come to acknowledge the superiority of the teacher—this being the rational thing to do.

*The Text*

We approach the critical concept of fusion of horizons via an important understanding of the role of the text in Gadamer’s hermeneutic experience. For Gadamer, the work of art possesses significance in that it represents tradition, authority and a claim to truth. Therefore, as Warneke notes, ‘...genuine understanding requires that we approach texts, laws and the interpretation of others with a respect not only for their otherness but also for their possible superiority in knowledge.’ 176 Again here the talk of superiority is couched in terms of

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possibilities, and so no interpretive engagement should be seen as an unreflective acceptance of prejudice. When discussing texts Gadamer is generally referring to literary or philosophical texts, though he uses legal statutes in his discussion of application and recognises their exemplary example. I will however be concentrating on his writing about art and literary texts as it allows an easy comparison with P4C’s focus on the same. For Gadamer the text represents the voice of tradition as present in a conversational encounter. For this to take place it is necessary that the contemporary interpreter perform neither the act of empathy, where she sees herself as ‘at one’ with the text, nor the act of projection, where the text acts as a mirror of her own sets of prejudices. Gadamer insists instead that ‘...a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity.’

Neither the empathic nor the projective stance allows a text to speak for itself as a valid participant in the dialectic of question and answer that shapes the hermeneutic encounter.

The text, as well as having its otherness recognised, must be brought to a constructive contemporaneous dialogue and extracted from a historicized situation, and brought to historical-effected understanding. In the former, the text remains an artefact of the time in which it was produced, with its meaning reduced to that of a signifier of another language-place. In this role, the text is relativised by its subjugation to time and the silence of the interpreter’s horizon. Hermeneutic understanding though demands, in extracting it from this alienation of meaning, that

... the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.

What does it mean to apply a text to a concrete situation? And why is this necessary to hermeneutic experience? For his answer Gadamer turns to the hermeneutic traditions of scripture and law. Here he recognises that in these disciplines it was always the case that meanings were developed through their usefulness and normative validity in contemporary situations. So a law, irrespective of its age, exhibits its utility only through its application to a particular legal problem, where it is interpreted by the legal community set to resolving that problem. To merely repeat the law is not to interpret it, as due to the shift in time and adjustments in culture this repetition may no longer have effect it was intended to have. The current controversy over marriage law in Australia is a case in point. The argument against a change that would allow gay marriages is repetition of the archaic statute, so that we hear

177 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 271.
178 Ibid., 307-08.
incessantly ‘marriage is between a man and a woman.’ The historically-effected person would understand that where once the man-woman union was a standard legal signifier of a loving union, this signification has shifted with time, as should properly the interpretation of the law. As well as this legal and scriptural historical precedent, the practice of application merely recognises that all understanding is historical, and that the concept of application formalises what we are already doing, whether we are aware of it or not. Whether we see interpretation as normative, as in law, or performative, as in the staging of a play, or cognitive as in the technical act of fidelity and reproduction, Gadamer suggests that the distinction has ‘...no fundamental vitality, but all three constitute one unitary phenomenon.’ In each we are equally bound by the cultural prejudice that enables to make sense of the texts we are grappling with. When we express the text so that it makes sense to us, we have already applied and translated it to our own situation.

For Gadamer the encounter with a traditional text has the most important value of enabling us to access the prejudices which are, in our everyday life, beyond our grasp. He recognises that it ‘...is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation.’ It is certainly the case that a classic text has, as one of its valuable qualities the ability for it to cause ruptures in the normal ways we think about the world, and I suggest that this is one of the reasons we read these texts. Exactly how one then goes about correcting incorrect prejudice because of this provocation Gadamer is reluctant to say, as that would mean a movement towards a technology of rational method, the very thing he is trying to avoid. Grondin observes however that,

...he alludes to the help of dialogue and temporal distance in sorting out the crucial difference between the true prejudices and the false ones. Often, it is through experience and time that we come to recognize what is appropriate and what is not.

We have learned that Gadamer only sees correct understanding when it is based on a true prejudice and he asks ‘[w]hat distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?’ It is through dialogue with a text that these prejudices can both be foregrounded and, with careful attention to the voice of its authority, corrected if need be. Additionally, he presents the idea of time and distance as one possible enabler of reflection on prejudice. In this he means the span between the place

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179 Ibid., 309.
180 Ibid., 298.
182 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 278.
of the production of the text and the place of the interpretation of the text. Once again I think it is certain that it can take difference in place and time for us to be certain of our judgements, not only by seeing their results, but by being apart from the moment in which they are made. This enables us to examine them with a separate clarity and disinterestedness. So for Gadamer, there are no processes or steps in truth finding, but difference and encounter, both of which resist a strict methodological accounting-for.

Language and the Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer’s understanding of Heidegger’s facticity sees him revive the term horizon, first conceptualised by Husserl is his efforts at separating the human life-world from the naturalised world of science. For Gadamer

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth...183

The horizon then is the boundary of language and culture that all humans find themselves enclosed in. It accounts for all of their prejudices, traditions, relations, and experiences as they act on human being and direct their interpretive endeavours. So all-consuming is the horizon that it cannot ever be fully accounted for in human knowledge, though it acts on us in everything we do. For the hermeneutic thinker, the horizon is the being of humans from which they are inseparable. In the above quote we can already see that for Gadamer the purpose of hermeneutic experience is the ‘opening up’ of horizon that occurs in authentic engagement. The horizon is world-view, and the experience of understanding should be an expansion of world-view. It sounds, appropriately, like a common goal of education and it certainly agrees with the Lipman P4C program aims. Gadamer consistently makes it clear that he sees understanding as something separate to knowing, or empathising with the other, or some other psychologistic aim that works towards the replication and matching of mental states. Gadamer warns that ‘[i]f we fail to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the traditionary text speaks, we will misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us.’184 He compares the interrogatory conversation where we ‘get to know’ someone but whose beliefs are not subjected to critique and we ourselves are held in abeyance due to our horizontal silence. Understanding is instead a merging of horizons, which ‘...always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of

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183 Ibid., 301.
184 Ibid., 302.
the other,\textsuperscript{185} where we bring our own horizons into play and all participants come to grasp world-views as a background to their claims.

It is important that at this point we observe the distinction Gadamer makes between fusion and agreement. If we were to merge horizons with a text, or interlocutor, we do not have to agree with those claims. Rather, it means that the claims being made by either are intelligible, that they have a basis we can articulate and form union with. This takes place in conversation; the process of question and answer that Gadamer finds exemplified in Plato’s Socrates (another apparent similarity with P4C which will be discussed below). Gadamer’s criteria for a successful conversation, one that results in a fusion of horizons, is clear. It is one where the participants

...come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.\textsuperscript{186}

The gaze of the conversation is not on the other’s psychological state, and we do not seek truth in this other as such. Participants find a way together towards understanding, though through a dialectical progress that is oriented towards the text under discussion and takes into account the horizon of the participants. Hermeneutic conversation is not an opportunity for the communication of one’s own thoughts at the risk of silencing other participants, as ‘...one shows that one is capable of a conversation by talking in a way that corresponds to the preparedness for conversation of the other and not by using it as an opportunity to carry on a monologue.’\textsuperscript{187} Proper fusion of horizons means that one’s own horizon is put into play, but as opinion or speculation, and that at the same time is put at risk in the interplay of belief. Of equal significance is Gadamer’s insistence that the ‘truth of the object’ shapes the discourse and its result. This reminds us of Gadamer’s roots in phenomenology, a practice in which the philosophical gaze was always directed at the object of inquiry, as only it had the quality of transcendental certainty. The last important aspect of the above criteria is that the dialogue leaves all participants transformed together (though not necessarily in the same way). This willingness to shift, to critique one’s own prejudice as well as that of the other, is perhaps the single critical element in hermeneutic dialogue, as without it no fusion can take place. All of this takes place around questioning, which ‘...breaks open the being of the object, as it

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 304.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 371.
were.’  

188 It is on the basis of the question that the mere appearance of the text is ruptured so that an investigation may begin and answers provided. Gadamer sees this convergence of text, horizon and dialogue as the summation of historically effected consciousness and ‘...the fusion of the horizons of understanding, which is what mediates between the text and its interpreter.’  

189 It is this fusion that is the goal of hermeneutic dialogue, and it is something that can only occur in language, the medium of all hermeneutic experience and understanding.

To what does hermeneutic experience aim, and what is the result of this experience if it must be in language? Gadamer draws the threads of interpretation and object together then by writing that ‘...all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter’s own language.’  

190 Without language there is no being of an object to be spoken about and so there is interpretation that can be established. For him the ontological status of any object must be its linguistic description, and this requires mediation, not projection, between subject and object.

In this Davey recognises that

Although Gadamer is at odds with Plato concerning the ontological priority of ideas over words, he openly concurs with him about conversation (dialegesthai) and the dialectical use of question and answer as means to bringing that which is beyond words (die Sachen) [matters] to come forth within language.  

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And so we come to the critical role that discussion plays in hermeneutic understanding.

Gadamer demands that a conversation, modelled on those that occur between people, can similarly occur between person and text. Thus it is possible to have a dialogue of sorts with a work of literature. Examined carefully, it can be shown how this is can be achieved if the ethic of question and answer is observed. Remembering that the purpose of dialogue is to fuse horizons in an act of understanding, it is viable to present the text as having a horizon of its own that is, at least initially, separate to the interpreter. The fact is of course that this horizon must be advocated by the interpreter, a judicious skill that requires sensitivity and knowledge.

The purpose of understanding is not psychological however, but to come to agreement about the subject matter that is the topic of conversation. Equally, the interpreter has her own horizon that is brought into play through the encounter with the text. This contrast of horizon, idea and language, hermeneutically conducted, results in an exchange of question and answer that works towards ‘...finding a common language [that] is not, any more than in real conversation, preparing a tool for the purpose of reaching understanding but, rather, coincides

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188 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 356.
189 Ibid., 370.
190 Ibid., 390.
191 Davey, Unquiet Understanding : Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics, 190.
with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement. So there is nothing to come after the discussion that is the product of the exchange. In the exchange lies the matter brought to language, not the development of tools with which to perform this operation. In understanding this it can be seen that participation is the only way into understanding and that one cannot sit by the sidelines, as it were, in the hope that someone else will do the work, or that the results will be communicated at some later date. One cannot appropriate the understanding of another, as this would then necessarily require further acts of interpretive work. In this way, ‘...we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.’ Hermeneutic interpretation is not a product but a process that takes place in time and place and that insists on the immediate and present activity of participants in dialogue and fusion. There is no that as a result of hermeneutical understanding. Hermeneutics is an event, not a product, and it unfolds over time and takes place only in language.

**Phronesis**

That phronesis is an idea first developed by Aristotle is well known, in that he defined it as type of practical wisdom used to choose the correct action to take in practical affairs. Such affairs resist categorisation, or the application of a universal heuristics of action, due to their complexity and the nebulous nature of ethical demands and human nature. Aristotle writes,

> An indication of this is the fact that we call people practically wise in some particular respect whenever they calculate well to promote some good end that lies outside the ambit of a skill; so, where living well as a whole is concerned, the person capable of deliberation will also be practically wise.

Phronesis has as its target not the immediate satisfaction of a temporal or material goal. Instead it casts its eye further afield to the achievement of a loftier aim, and acts in ways such that this goal might be achieved. We can readily see how holistically one must act with such an aspiration in mind, and so if one is to exhibit phronesis it must be done so in all elements of a life, and one’s conduct must be particularly tactful, as well as knowledgeable. Aristotle contrasted phronesis with techne, the skill and knowledge of the craftsperson that can be applied more or less consistently in the manipulation of material. A real world comparison can be found in the knowledge a judge uses in deciding the guilt of a defendant in court, compared to the knowledge a laboratory technician might use in order to conduct an experiment that

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193 Ibid., 484.
must adhere to rigorous and formalised procedures and tolerances. For the judge ‘justice’ might be her aspirational goal, and the complex of knowledges she must work with would extend far beyond the law, and on towards the sum of professional and personal experiences that make up her legal subjectivity. The laboratory technician, on the other hand, can acquit himself in his work in exemplary fashion with a less diverse knowledge basis on which to draw, and would very deliberately bracket out those very subjectivities on which the judge relies.

I do not use these examples incidentally, as they very clearly reflect the contrast Gadamer describes throughout his work between the imperatives demanded by the methods of the natural sciences and the sensitivities and subjectivities demanded by hermeneutic work. While Gadamer was always prepared to acknowledge the worth of method in particular instances, in *phronesis* he found the category of thought best suited to act as a thoughtful and ethical guide to human worldly action, and in *phronesis* as well he found the most suitable orientation for hermeneutic work. As he writes it,

Practical knowledge, *phronesis*, is another kind of knowledge. Primarily, this means that it is directed towards the concrete situation... Although practicing this virtue means that one distinguishes what should be done from what should not, it is not simply practical shrewdness and general cleverness. The distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between the proper and the improper and thus presupposes a moral attitude, which it continues to develop.

For Gadamer, and for myself, the practice of hermeneutics is primarily an ethics of *understanding* that cannot be captured by method, and cannot be undertaken by someone who is merely ‘shrewd’ or ‘clever,’ but by one who is able to practice a range of personal qualities exhibited by the experienced and wise. Aristotle describes the person who exhibits *phronesis* as one who is able to ‘...deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous... to the good life generally.’ Phronesis, then, is a moral orientation to the world and the good, in just the same way that hermeneutics should be. As well as an ethics of understanding, the second suggestion in Gadamer’s quote is that phronesis is concerned with ‘the concrete situation’ and so does not seek to create idealised universal rules in order to be applied in correct worldly action. In *phronesis* there is not a strict universal—particular relationship, but one in which each informs the other. As Gadamer writes it, ‘...understanding, like action, always involves a risk and is never just the simple application of a general knowledge of rules to the statements or texts to be understood.’ *Phronesis* then is a far more complex mode of

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thinking when compared to the heuristics of method, and it is this type of thinking that
hermeneutics both demands and develops.

Hermeneutics firstly demands *phronesis* by recognising that

...if we relate Aristotle’s description of the ethical phenomenon and especially the virtue of
moral knowledge to our own investigation, we find that his analysis in fact offers a kind of
model of the problems of hermeneutics... The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries
to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something
universal, that he first understands it per se, and then afterward uses it for particular
applications.\(^{198}\)

It is not possible then to act hermeneutically without understanding that the act of application
in interpreting texts requires the same sense of judgement and tact as that required by
*phronesis*. Gadamer has in fact looked to this mode of thinking as the very model on which
understanding is based. We have seen above that understanding necessarily requires
application in order for it to be effected, and equally that this application cannot be
undertaken through the method of applying universals to concrete situations. *Phronesis*
models for us application as it reflects the fact that good moral thinking, in recognising
normative imperatives, must be better able to recognise them as guidelines or precedents. A
well as the act of application, the hermeneutic consciousness must eventually develop the
correlative understanding that just as texts resist universalising applications, so too ‘[e]very
general ethical principle, regardless of its status, must be reinterpreted to accommodate the
unique circumstances of our historical condition.’\(^{199}\) A moral consciousness, one that guides
practical acts, is demanded of the interpreter as the act of application must always reflect an
ethical commitment through the interpretation. Given that this must take place in discussion
with others, under the critical influence of tradition as well as reflection on the self in action,
the possibility of evading such commitment is unlikely. Finally *phronesis* demands of the
interpreter a broader consciousness and horizon than the immediate and subjective. Instead,
‘[w]hat is apprehended in practical knowledge is clearly not this or that specific possible action
alone. Rather the good itself: the good in the form of the good life, is always already and
primarily apprehended.’\(^{200}\) For any action to be justifiable, and equally any interpretation,
some ‘good’ beyond the text or situation must be appealed to. Through the demands of
hermeneutic discussion, which should always begin and end in the recognition of prejudice,
the development of a personal good that can be articulated and defended is required.

\(^{198}\) Truth and Method, 320-21.
\(^{199}\) David Ingram, “Hermeneutics and Truth,” in Hermeneutics and Praxis, ed. Robert Hollinger (Indiana: University of
Notre Dame Press, 1985), 49.
\(^{200}\) Gunter Figal, “Phronesis as Understanding: Situating Philosophical Hermeneutics,” in The Spector of Relativism:
Focussing on Similarities: Rorty, Pragmatism and Hermeneutics

It is no doubt clear by now that there exist many similarities between the philosophies of hermeneutics and pragmatism. They share an orientation to lived experience and a concern for addressing the problems encountered in this experience. They also reject foundationalism, where philosophy is seen as the ‘first science’, and the concept of mind (resulting in the various dualisms) found in traditional philosophy. In some ways they share a commitment to the historicity of human being and are critics of systematic philosophy. There are of course some substantial differences as well, most notable in their opposing beliefs about method and experience. To draw these strands together I will close this section with thinking on this subject by Rorty, surely the best known later twentieth century pragmatist. Rorty’s appropriation of Gadamer is admittedly idiosyncratic and selective. For example, ‘...while both incorporate pragmatist notions of warrant and communal justification, in Rorty’s opinion truth is merely a name for certain statements that we agree to call true because they help us cope with reality, while in Gadamer’s view truth is a property of something which reality reveals.’

Never the less, his interpretation still makes for a significant contribution to this work. Rorty finds fruitful synergies between the two schools of thought, and so it is perhaps no surprise that he considered Dewey and Heidegger (along with Wittgenstein) to be the most significant of the twentieth century philosophers, as he saw their work not as systematic but as disruptive of the tradition and so edifying. It is not difficult as well to find the pragmatism in the work of this rarefied group, and Rorty is well known for locating these tendencies in his own work. He expresses his clearest thinking on the links between his brand of pragmatism and Gadamer’s hermeneutics in the final chapters of his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. After spending much of the book arguing for an end to epistemology, which he sees inevitably ends in foundational philosophies, and is based on an incorrect assumptions about the mind (the mirror), and its relation to knowledge (the real), he turns to Gadamer’s hermeneutics for a ‘cure’. He does not see hermeneutics however as a replacement for epistemology, but as gesturing away from philosophy to what he calls edifying discourse.

In Rorty’s argument against epistemology lies an argument against the demand that rationality is equivalent to commensurability. For philosophers who seek this, the assumption is that a master schema against which all statements can be mapped and judged as true or false is the judge of the reasoned statement and the necessary bulwark against anything-
goes relativism. For Rorty, ‘[h]ermeneutics is largely a struggle against this assumption.’\textsuperscript{203} Schema construction always results in contradictions, regressions, and a faith in metaphysics that itself founders under Rorty’s examination. Hermeneutics instead replaces commensuration with a recognition first and always of the alterity of the other, be it text or person, and the demand that we should not become the other (made commensurable) but that we understand the other through a fusion of horizons—so that they always maintain their integrity and distinct identity, while being subject to shifts in belief due to the encounter. For Rorty, as in Gadamer, the locus of the exchange is the Socratic figure (who is again understood differently to that in the P4C tradition), whose role it is to ensure that ‘[d]isagreements between disciplines and discourses are compromised or transcended in the course of the conversation.’\textsuperscript{204} In the ebb and flow of conversation neither side sees it as their duty, or right, to win the argument by absorption or sublation, and the Socratic figure is there to ensure that each side is willing to give ground, see the horizon of the other and shift to alternate and mutually acceptable terms of engagement. For Rorty, ‘[t]his notion of interpretation suggests that coming to understand is more like getting acquainted with a person than like following a demonstration... until gradually we feel at ease with what was hitherto strange.’\textsuperscript{205} This is a substantially different goal to that prescribed in P4C.

Rorty also recognises in Gadamer a shift in what it might mean to be educated in a hermeneutic sense rather than an epistemological sense. Absent from my recount of Gadamer’s work previously is his notion of Bildung, meaning education or formation over time. In this, Gadamer again recognises the temporal being of human existence, and that as we become acquainted with culture we become changed by it which is a necessary and positive element of education and flourishing. Gadamer suggests that it ‘...is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation,’\textsuperscript{206} and therefore it is a dialogue between the self and culture rather than an accumulation of facts. For Rorty this can be critically extrapolated to the role of thinking, and used overcome the assumption that thinking is equivalent to knowledge acquisition. He observes that:

\begin{quote}
To say that we become different people, that we "remake" ourselves as we read more, talk more, and write more, is simply a dramatic way of saying that the sentences which become
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 316.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 317.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{206} Gadamer, Truth and Method, 10.
\end{flushright}
true of us by virtue of such activities are often more important to us than the sentences which become true of us when we drink more, earn more, and so on.\textsuperscript{207}

In this he is clearly privileging certain types of activities over others, and shifting thinking towards the \textit{existential} realm of experience and self-understanding. It seems clear that his reinvention does not take place while we are going about our everyday business in an unreflective manner, and that genuine \textit{Bildung} must take place under a certain set of conditions that suggest pause, reflection and interaction with something greater than common experience. He is suggesting of course that hermeneutics is the space where fruitful interaction between the self and culture take place, and that important things happen in this space. For Rorty, the eventfulness of hermeneutic experience is, when compared to the everyday, the difference between \textit{normal} and \textit{abnormal} discourse, a concept he borrows from Kuhn. For Kuhn, the shift from normal to abnormal science marks the shift from a common agreed theory about the world to the flux that occurs when dissonant observations put that theory’s validity in abeyance. For both Rorty and Kuhn abnormality suggests the possibility of change, development and \textit{improvement}, and so for Rorty the possibility of hermeneutic engagement means the possibility of a reinvented and improved sense of the self. In this, Rorty sees the existential task that should be the goal of the post-philosophical thinker and it is here that he marks out a shift towards philosophy as \textit{edification}.

For Rorty, as for Gadamer, culture has the critical role to play in this edification of the self, not in any ultimately \textit{normative} sense, but in the sense that abnormality requires a normality with which to form its understanding of self. He stresses that abnormal discourse cannot occur in a vacuum, and that the tools of re-invention require familiarity with extant culture and knowledge:

\begin{quote}
The caution amounts to saying that abnormal and "existential" discourse is always parasitic upon normal discourse, that the possibility of hermeneutics is always parasitic upon the possibility (and perhaps upon the actuality) of epistemology, and that edification always employs materials provided by the culture of the day.\textsuperscript{208}
\end{quote}

So there is a significant role for education in providing people with both the tools of reinvention (language, inspiration, motivation) as well as the field of critique by which edifying transition takes place. These tools lie in culture. We are already their product, to some extent, but for Rorty and Gadamer a thorough grounding in classic culture is one part of the experience of edification. At the heart of this demand lies Rorty’s further commitment to what a life lived is, and what sort of people we need to be. In using the term ‘existential’ Rorty is

\textsuperscript{207} Rorty, \textit{Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature}, 359.  
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 366.
saying that we have no essence—that we must accept freedom and choose our own projects. To always act ‘normally’, to refuse to confront oneself with a dissonant horizon or incommensurable idea that might precipitate a shift to the abnormal, for Rorty is to disregard the commitment we should have to ourselves to always choose our own true path. Helping us find this true path is the role of ‘[e]difying philosophers [who] want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause...’ and can open up the field of possibility through their dissonant views of the world. So we can see that thinking for Rorty has undergone significant transformation, via Gadamer’s hermeneutics, from knowledge to abnormal discourse, from consummation to dissonance, and from mental sublation to existential realisation.

So where are we left then with philosophising, if it can be called that anymore? In the movement towards the hermeneutic discourse that Rorty recommends, he leaves us with two thoughts. The first thought addresses what it is that we’re doing when we speak, and again questions the assumption that philosophy is about knowledge. For Rorty there is a distinction again between inquiry and conversation. He warns us against the notion that in philosophical dialogue we might be making true claims about matters of fact. In discussing the work of the edifying philosopher he observes that, ‘...they do not think that when we say something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be saying something—participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry.’\(^2\) The ‘perhaps’ here is hardly making an absolute claim to certainty, but then if it were so it might contradict Rorty’s point. When talking of views, Rorty believes that we have once again fallen into the trap of what he calls the ‘ocular’ metaphor, of seeing the mind as an internal mirror that can accurately reflect reality through externalised sentences. If we let go of the mirror metaphor, we are left with a type of epistemological behaviourism that is found in our actions in the world, and our interactions with people in that world. So if we can speak ourselves into a new way of being by way of these interactions, and if they satisfy our needs as beings, then we have edification. We can leave it at that and not look any further for the additional bit of grounding that makes our behaviour and beliefs true. In Rorty’s second thought lies a summative encounter between method and wisdom, an encounter that has particular resonance for this work overall. Throughout his writing on hermeneutics, Rorty appears to deliberately avoid using the term dialogue when describing his program of edification. In his summary he returns to the notion of phronesis and explains this absence.

\(^2\) Ibid., 371.
One way of thinking of wisdom... is to think of it as the practical wisdom necessary to participate in a conversation. One way to see edifying philosophy as the love of wisdom is to see it as the attempt to prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into a research program. Edifying philosophers can never end philosophy, but they can help prevent it from attaining the secure path of a science.\footnote{Ibid., 372.}

We often hear talk of Socratic \textit{dialogue} and a Socratic \textit{method} oriented towards concept development in P4C. Rorty’s (and Gadamer’s) Socrates however represent a different kind of figure for the goal of edification, and it is clear that he sees inquiry as a \textit{degenerate} activity due to its relationship to \textit{science}. \textit{Philosophical inquiry}, another frequently heard phrase, is clearly another target. Rorty is quoting any number of philosophers when he talks of a ‘secure path of a science,’ and is criticising both their goal and their method. In these he sees the attempt by philosophers to draw inquiry to a close, and to secure its descriptions of the world. For Rorty, the greater danger here is that this will also entail a secure description of \textit{human being}; an essentialised picture of us that can preserved in a jar of formaldehyde and placed up on a shelf, and so represent a completed project. Against this image of the scientist he places the image of the wise conversationalist, whose job it is to reach up again for the jar and problematise the ‘results’ attained by this inquiry into being. The edifying philosopher, the person of wisdom, has the skills to not complete inquiries but to reject their findings, in fact to reject the notion of an inquiry, and instead sustain the great conversation of humankind. This is why Rorty’s Socratic figure is always reactive, and his wisdom is conceived of as \textit{conversational and hermeneutic, rather than dialogical and systematic}.

\textbf{Conclusion: A Hermeneutic Critique of Philosophy for Children}

What then do we have if P4C is critiqued from a hermeneutic framework—if my set of prejudices in this work are deliberately hermeneutic? My thesis is that philosophical hermeneutics, when brought to dialogue with P4C, has some constructive observations to make about its assumptions and consequent practices. A similar dialogue can be developed between myself as a primary school teacher (of everything) and myself as a high school teacher of English. What began as a method of teaching critical thinking to primary school students can be used as a strategy to help high school students to think about books, the world and themselves. This strategy is distinctly philosophical in an \textit{edifying} sense, and finds its origin and inspiration in Lipman’s original program. My hermeneutic critique however will look at several at elements of P4C raised earlier; its belief that \textit{philosophy is inquiry and method}, its understanding of \textit{community and use of the text}, its definition of \textit{philosophy as concept development}, and its \textit{reliance on dialogue}. With the assistance of Gadamer and Rorty, I can
uncover the elements that are found in the method and assumptions of P4C. I will show however that it is feasible to be both pragmatic and hermeneutic in philosophical intent, and that consequently it is feasible as well to reconstruct Lipman’s program using a hermeneutic—pragmatic amalgam that finds its ends in what Rorty has called edifying discourse. Finally, we will see that this hermeneuticised P4C apple, while being a distinct formulation, has not fallen too far from the Lipman tree.

*Philosophy as Method*

The parallels between the method of P4C above and the method of the natural sciences are evident, and it is clear that it is based on a technical and rational approach to knowledge acquisition. We can see that it traces similar steps to the scientific methods and procedures that take place in scientific communities, and that it critically also shares some of the same language of those communities (hypothesis, counter-examples, inquiry). In this regard Biesta recognises that P4C method,

> ‘... gives the impression that at least to a certain extent the approach is less about a community of philosophical enquiry and more about a community of scientific enquiry, one based, moreover, on a particular ‘rational-epistemological’ view of what scientific knowledge is and how it is brought about.’

I agree that in this method lie some assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and truth—specifically that its acquisition must be based on a careful observance of the correct methodical steps, that each movement forward is rationally motivated and evidence based, and that there is a product to show for the efforts expended. Peirce, who presented the scientific procedure as able to answer philosophical questions, has an enduring influence and his beliefs can still be seen in the above procedure. All of these aspects indicate an essential commitment to the idea that P4C is an epistemological procedure brought to bear on philosophical questions. Hermeneutics criticises an approach that assumes a scientific methodology is apt to examine questions of existential significance. In its place it presents a series of principles, which I think can perhaps best be summarised as *ethical* rather than *methodological*, which in one way or another attend to experience of the other in conversation. So rather than maintaining the philosophical gaze on method and concept, the hermeneutic inquirer’s first concerns are the ethical constraints on knowledge development and the traditional text. Gadamer argues against hermeneutics being a method as he shows that ‘...understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it

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chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge.’ Hermeneutic understanding should not be construed as subjective either (and accusations of relativism in hermeneutics are common), but an embedding of the matter of interest in a cultural context and language that dialogically works towards this goal. Equally, to present the Socratic Method as being a series of questions, and to follow a procedure (the elenchus), is to read Socrates in way to very different hermeneutic philosophy. For hermeneutics, Socrates presents the opportunity to negotiate a way between differing horizons such that they not so much agree (the goal of P4C), but so that they understand each other such and their world is reinvented. There are other resistances to method that can be summarised by Davey, who writes that, ‘[p]hilosophical hermeneutics is less a method of interpretation but more a disciplined practice of speculative sensibility.’ This excludes it from the usual methodical considerations of subject matter and closure.

Community and Text

The problematic constraints on community and use of the text in P4C deserve consideration as well. For P4C the community of inquiry stops at the classroom door. It is amongst the students and teachers themselves that the dialogue takes place, and it is incumbent on these community members to do all the thinking on a subject. In the method of P4C a text or other artefact is used to provoke a question in the community. In this manner I think it might be used well, but at that point the text is put to one side and not referred to again, while the community members reason out a solution to the problem. This seems to neglect the role of history and culture in self-development and understanding, as well as ignore as what Gadamer saw as the potential truth value to be found in classical texts. Gadamer critically sees that ‘...the understanding consciousness acquires—through its immediate access to literary tradition—a genuine opportunity to change and widen its horizon, and thus enrich its world by a whole new and deeper dimension.’ For him, the text demonstrates its worth as a partner in discussion through the ability of its interpreters to apply it to their own context and expand their own horizon accordingly. Rorty too recognises the importance of culture as a requirement in edifying discourse. It is the case that some iterations of P4C acknowledge the importance of classic texts in philosophical inquiry, but they become forgotten stimulus once a question has been decided upon. In hermeneutics the community must act as advocates for its continued membership of the community where it must play a role in the dialogue and in fact become one of the dialogical partners in understanding and horizon expansion.

212 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 308.
213 Davey, Unquiet Understanding : Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics, 26.
214 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 391.
Dialogue and Conversation

Dialogue in P4C maintains a strong relationship to that model presented by Socrates, in that it is rational, teacher-directed, and methodical in that it consists of a series of intentional moves that are product oriented. Gadamer as well looks Plato’s Socrates for his model of dialogue, and in this there is some concurrence with P4C, but the emphasis is substantially different. In P4C it is the ‘technique’ of Socrates that is highlighted; a technique that allows the teacher to gradually work a student towards conceptual clarity. In Gadamer (and Rorty) however we read of a different Socrates, one who is so not concerned with direction or product, but who asks questions to open up the field of inquiry, to search for ignorance, and sustain the conversation. Lipman instead talks of product, direction, and conclusion. For Gadamer, in opposition to conceptions of a Socratic method, he argues against the codification of what he sees as an art rather than a technique. He writes that there should be no Socratic ‘conducting’ of conversation as:

...the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. 215

The openness of hermeneutic questions and answers as well have as their intention the merging of horizons and understanding of the other, instead of conceptual clarity. Rorty takes up this theme as well in writing, ‘[f]or epistemology, conversation is implicit inquiry. For hermeneutics, inquiry is routine conversation.’ 216 Returning to the idea of method in P4C, we identify philosophy with epistemology as we have an exchange that must be based on the model of dialogue, with its according standards of turn taking, evidence, justification, and reason. These qualities are all fine for certain types of inquiry, but they will hardly lead to unconcealment and reinvention, possibilities that belong to conversation.

Concept Development and Phronesis

Finally hermeneutics questions whether philosophy is only and always concept development. Once again is it certain there is some agreement between P4C and Gadamer who agrees with Lipman that the examination of concepts is an appropriate practice, but for Gadamer philosophy does not stop with the concept. He sees a connection between concepts and science where he writes:

215 Ibid., 385.
216 Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 318.
Our fate will be decided by how well the world that bears the stamp of science, and that was philosophically expressed through the world of concepts, will be able to bring itself into harmony with the equally deep insights into the destiny of humanity that have come to expression, for example, in a dialogue with a Chinese master with his disciple...217

He is suggesting that that which is revealed through conversation, and not necessarily summarised conceptually in the manner of science, is also a type of philosophy where it is spoken. Of course it is unfair to reduce all conceptual thinking to scientific thinking, but my analysis of P4C consistently finds these tendencies in its practice. So, in my fieldwork, I develop hermeneutics into a practice where bringing ideas into language, or learning to talk together, or speak about being, is considered philosophical. In this way philosophy might be seen as the ethical and poetic practice of conversing with to the other. Here Davey makes an interesting contribution by recommending that, ‘Gadamer should have made a stronger distinction between Sachen and concepts... Whereas as he believes that it is “our historical fate to speak the language of concepts,” we should in this context speak more of subject matters and less of concepts.’218 In P4C there is always the object of discussion that is a concept, but for hermeneutics the existential imperative of reinvention cannot always find its motivation in such. Rorty suggests that marking out existentially the territory of your own linguistic re-invention in a non-conceptual, abnormal sense is edifying, and, I contend, philosophical.

218 Davey, Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics, 191.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The philosophical heritage outlined in previous chapters suggested clear directions in which to guide my research in the field of the classroom. In particular it guided me in terms of the qualities I sought to develop in my students’ linguistic and interpersonal interactions, as well as the organisational strategies I used to do so. Just as clearly, and just as importantly if I was to maintain a tempered consistency throughout this work, this heritage provided me with a set of principles on which to base my methodological approach to this research. Very broadly, these principles demanded that I find a pragmatic solution to a problem that I encountered in my everyday life-world, and that this solution was constructed by me through a sustained practical interaction with this life-world. In accordance with this, it was necessary that I considered myself neither only a theoretician, nor a practitioner, but a researcher who integrated and enacted the two modes of being in a form of praxis. This allowed me to satisfy the technical and theoretical demands of practice according to my ethical beliefs and the good of education more generally. This also demanded that, as I was investigating the social phenomenon of truth finding (something involving complex interactions between people in a natural setting), I undertook a qualitative rather than quantitative approach to my methodological construction, and resisted anything that might be a construed as a positivist or experimental approach. Along with this qualitative principle I was further guided in my analysis of the empirical material by the principles of hermeneutic understanding; those principles laid out by Gadamer et al. which saw the coming to understanding of these materials as a conversational and interpretive process that avoided reduction to a specific method. To this I added that there must be a critical element to my work, not critical in the narrower sense of an immanent investigation, but in the broader sense that members of the Frankfurt school (for example) articulate when they align a critique of science’s colonisation of the life-world with human emancipation.

In a variety of ways the above principles demanded that I did away with any commitments to universality in my truth claims, or commitments to fundamental truths, or the ability of philosophy (or any other discursive practice) to underpin itself with foundational certainties. Broadly put, the critical-hermeneutic methodological position I arrived at rejected any claims such as these as an ongoing relic of philosophical history motivated by Plato’s will to believe in a truth that was transcendental. I think that rather than attempting to claim anything as Truth, we have as our best tool against irrationalism the interpretive quality of our reflective linguistic interactions with other people in the world. This commitment played itself out in a variety of ways and in fact has already begun; notably in my rejection of any objectivist...
claims that is evidenced in the extended statement of my own horizon in the introduction. Now, the sections below will further articulate how each of these principles were supported methodologically.

The question, then, of how I went about designing my research was not one that was open-ended but one for which I already had a substantial series of requirements. Given my philosophical commitments, I found that that a single design model was not able to serve my purposes adequately without some modification or further delineation. I investigated a range of methodologies, all drawn from the principles outlined above, as well as the philosophical commitments made in previous chapters. I developed a hybrid model based largely on critical and hermeneutic theories and practices.

**Positioning**

The preceding chapters have made my philosophical commitments clear enough. The arguments I presented have located my stance as an amalgam of Rorty’s linguistified and anti-foundational pragmatism, and Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Among these primary theorists I referred to a range of other thinkers who are broadly sympathetic to their project of a situated and historical being that resists positivism and method, and is instead engaged in open and reflective interpretation from which meanings emerge. Below, I demonstrate how each of these stances shaped the way in which I approached my empirical research, along with my philosophical horizon.

It is with some irony as well that I must also deal in a methodology chapter with my commitment to a stance that necessarily rejects ‘method’ as it is typically understood outside of the research field (that is as an epistemologically rigorous heuristic for knowledge gathering). Within the research field though, this suspicion is better discussed along with methodology. In previous chapters again I have discussed at length the reaction against method (as that defined by the natural sciences) by which Gadamer’s hermeneutic work is largely defined. Consistent with this is Rorty’s anti-epistemological stance, and so I have little to say of epistemology as well. Much of this chapter then is an argument against ‘method’ as it is typically understood, as the hermeneutic paradigm, which is central to this work, is by its very nature resistant to such constraints. Further, in setting out such a paradigm, I defined the distinction between methodology and method, as there was a real possibility of a conceptual confusion as the terms are sometimes erroneously interchanged. I believed it was necessary to first position myself within a paradigm as ‘[w]ithout nominating a paradigm as the first step,
there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design.”

The Choice of Paradigm

It is frequently the case that ‘paradigm’ and ‘methodology’ are conflated or confused in such a way that a statement of methodology contains within it certain tacit paradigmatic commitments or assumptions. I intend to make these explicit. Feilzer defines paradigm in the context of research as ‘...an organizing structure, a deeper philosophical position relating to the nature of social phenomena and social structures. This use of paradigm relates it directly to research, as an epistemological stance...’ In the sense that the word ‘philosophy’ is used in her definition, she suggests that methodology supervenes on paradigm, thus giving the choice of methodology (and then method) a more secure basis. Morgan, in his examination of ‘paradigm’ as it relates to social research, problematises the concept by revealing a range of meanings of the word. These extend from a researcher’s worldview, to her epistemological beliefs, to the shared understandings within a group of inquirers. Given this research’s hermeneutic background, it is the ‘worldview’ that I will briefly examine and contrast with an ‘epistemological’ definition. Morgan favours the definition of paradigm as worldview because:

[m]aking the connection between paradigms as worldviews... points to the many factors that go into decisions about what to study and how to do such a study. For example, some researchers emphasize issues of social change and justice, whereas others concentrate on testing or creating theories in their specific fields. These kinds of preferences point to the influence of individual worldviews on the topics researchers choose to study and how they choose to conduct that work.

In reading the definition above it is easy enough to see how closely aligned Morgan’s concept of ‘worldview’ is with the hermeneutic concepts of ‘life-world’ and ‘horizon,’ and one could easily surmise that their philosophical heritage is shared. Gadamer similarly recognises, along with Husserl, that ‘...world horizon is a presupposition of all science... and is, therefore more fundamental,’ and further that ‘...the concept of life-world is the antithesis of all objectivism.’ As well, by coincidence or not, in his definition above Morgan has touched on another worldview important to this research, that of a political and critical aspect to its motivations, in my case motivated by an orientation towards Habermas and Heidegger and

222 Ibid., 52.
223 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 239.
their rejection of the colonising effects of science in the life world and, in particular, Heidegger’s original claim of humans as being essentially interpretive in nature. And finally the pragmatic orientation of this research is also touched upon in the above quote in that the researcher is seen as a tester of theory in her own world that has thrown up a particular problem that requires resolution.

Together this set of definitions goes further towards foregrounding the commitments that should be made in order to properly justify a course of research. Paradigm meshes with life-world in that they both take as given first of all that any methodological approach is founded a set of beliefs that is precedent. They are beliefs that are distinctly unscientific, or unobjective, in the first instance due to their appearing prior to scientific methodologies, and intensely personal in the second instance due to their embeddedness in the lifeworld of the researching subject. Further, this definition of paradigm, rather than reject the non-objectivity it suggests, embraces it as a valid mode of investigation if its tacit requirements are fulfilled; if a comprehensive statement of the life-world of the researcher is properly investigated and made explicit as part of the research process. This is not done so as to achieve scientific objectivity but so as to mark it out as a separate kind of inquiry that springs from the life-world of the researcher, and interprets data according to hermeneutic principles rather than scientific methods. The following sub-sections, then, are a brief explanation of the paradigms on which I have based my research, which is itself an extension of my life-world.

Critical Theory and Praxis

Critical theory and continental philosophy are inextricable linked – and in some ways they can be seen as conflated practices within the same tradition. So the fact that several of the philosophers that underpin this work are from the continental tradition (Heidegger and Gadamer) or have some affinities with this tradition (late Rorty and early Habermas) and are useful in constructing a critical theoretical approach to research is not coincidental or my own invention. The fact that Habermas and Gadamer were able to have such a rich though contrastive ongoing dialogue is sufficient indication of a shared heritage. It is the case that the works of continental philosophers are frequently seen as contributing to critical theory, or that they are viewed or as critical theorists per se. Critical theory briefly can be summarised by the following as a discipline that

...tries to understand why the social world is as it is and, more importantly, through a process of critique, strives to know how it should be. Critical theory starts from a critique of ideology, defined as distorted knowledge, to enable individuals to become self consciously aware of
knowledge distortions. This self-conscious awareness of knowledge distortion is enlightenment...  

The critical theorist then is not content to leave things just as they are or provide balanced descriptions of social phenomena for objective documentary purposes. She rather sees the project of human emancipation as a personal goal, and one that rests on the uncovering of false beliefs generally created by the dominating forces of power, capital and the natural sciences. Sherman readily acknowledges that the term ‘critical theory’ is problematic because it has come to mean so many things to different practitioners. He finds a place for it specifically however by concentrating on the work of the Frankfurt School, which generally held that ‘...critical theory is concerned with mediating the ideals of philosophy (which includes such notions as “freedom,” “equality,” “justice,” and “reconciliation”) and society’s prevailing practices and underlying tendencies.’

The focus on the Frankfurt school as the genesis of critical theory suited the purpose of my research firstly due to my use of the work of Heidegger’s hermeneutics and the similarities in some of his philosophical programs with the Frankfurt school theorists. Heidegger’s initial program was one of critique, or Destruktion, where he sought to dismantle traditional conceptions of philosophy due to their metaphysical basis. In recognising that these conceptions had overlooked the proper examination of the question of being, he realigned his inquiries and undertook a phenomenological analysis of being – starting with human being. His explication of Dasein is one that is existential, situated and interpretive in nature. He was also a critic of the unexamined nature of technology, something that he believed ‘...banishes man into a kind of revealing that is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing.’ Heidegger forced later thinkers to examine this picture of humans when juxtaposed against the technological and instrumental society gradually developing through the course of the twentieth century. Newell suggests then that Heidegger’s theory gave us ‘...a much-heightened sensitivity toward the perceived failings of modern society extended beyond the economic to include the cultural, psychological, and esthetic, [a position that is] broadly characteristic of the Frankfurt School.’ Throughout Heidegger’s philosophical program his constant reinterpretation and consequent re-description of being and experience was by its nature critical in intent.

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The use of the Frankfurt school coheres just as well with my use of Habermas, the best-known contemporary exponent of the Frankfurt school of critical theory. Habermas, while being a recognised member of the Frankfurt School, by the 1980s had turned away from the school’s first generation’s concern with subject-object relationships, dialectics and unpromising views of society. He is recognised as the leading member of the second generation of Frankfurt school philosophers and a leader of critical theory in general. Rather than continue with the earlier critiques of society though he took the linguistic turn (much of his later work is analytic in nature) and developed a more positive vision for the potential of society by attempting to ‘...retrieve the emancipatory potential of Enlightenment reason, and to instantiate that retrieval at the core of communicative action.’\(^\text{228}\) It is this aspect of critical theory generally, and Habermas specifically, that is germane to the construction of my research program.

One fruitful benefit Habermas’s theory of communicative action is its highlighting of the ‘...tendency for... communicative activity to be disrupted as a result of its becoming increasingly ordered, controlled, and regulated by the economic market and the administrative system.’\(^\text{229}\) Unsurprisingly perhaps Habermas believes that there is a place for philosophers and philosophy in acting as counsel and critical guides to the wider public that he defends as follows:

Given that it maintains an intimate relationship to both the sciences and to common sense, and that it understands the specialized idioms of expert cultures as well as it does the ordinary language of everyday life, philosophy can, for example, criticize the colonisation of a life world that has been gutted by trends towards commercialization, bureaucratization, and legalizations as well as scientization.\(^\text{230}\)

This is a distinctly critical-theoretical description of the role of the relationship of theory to practice that a philosopher of Habermas’s interests might conceive it. It is questionable whether only philosophers who might be able to play this role—rather it is only a role that someone of Habermas’s wide range of interests and knowledge could play. It is the case however that his theory does provide the empirical researcher with a theoretical perspective with which to hold up society to closer examination.

Very broadly aspects of these two philosophers’ work can be seen as a criticism of similar aspects of modernity and the effect of these on the consciousness of the contemporary


human subject. Given the political aspects of this research, which are in part accounted for with Heidegger's description of the authentic human as an interpretive being and Habermas's critical acceptance of our hermeneutic situation, a firm basis exists on which to develop distinctly politically based practical actions. Earlier I have described how actions oriented by beliefs such as the ethical or, eventually, what constitutes your idea of the good life were first denoted by Aristotle as *phronesis*. Aristotle believed that two faculties, the intellect (rational thought) and the appetite (desire and aspiration) worked together as causes of human action. The mere contemplation of an idea in intellectual terms is not sufficient to motivate action, nor is unconstrained desire able to result in useful action. Aristotle believed that ‘...choice [the origin of action] necessarily involves not only intellect and thought, but a certain moral state; for good conduct and its contrary necessarily involve thought and character.’\(^\text{231}\)

Allowing for the further requirement of purposive thought in order for the manifestation of action we are left we the idea that, for Aristotle, action stems from the *intellectual* quality as well as the *moral* virtue of the acting agent. And so we come to see this action, or *praxis*, as explicitly ethically oriented action aimed at some good as opposed, for example, to an amoral instrumental knowledge concerned only with technical production and outcomes. In further support of this definition of ethically oriented action Critchley writes that

> ...the touchstone of philosophy in the Continental tradition might be said to be *practice*; that is to say, our historically and culturally embedded life in the world as finite selves. It is this touchstone of practice that leads philosophy towards a critique of present conditions, as conditions not amenable to freedom, and to the utopian demand that things be otherwise...\(^\text{232}\)

The design and overall motivation of my research should be viewed in terms of the above understandings of *praxis*; as a politically concerned and interested practical program that finds its orientation in a particular set of values about what a 'good' education is. These values are aligned with the broad program of critical theory more generally, and are supported by a commitment to act on or enact these values in all aspects of my research. The fundamental aim of this work is to criticise and dissolve the science-influenced naturalistic and instrumental shadows of early pragmatism from the P4C program.

**Hermeneutics and the Qualitative**

The pragmatist Rorty argues against epistemology as a subject for philosophy in general as it seeks for a foundational status that attempts what he sees as a flawed program—that of continuing a program of *a priori* knowledge that escapes language, time and culture in the


search for a position from which it can make claims to certainty. From this idealised position philosophy would be able to place itself as that discipline prior to all others and so make commensurable ‘the facts’ as they then appear to the philosopher. Rorty’s primary arguments against philosophy’s claim to primacy have been summarised in earlier chapters but here I will remind the reader that he sees this claim as ‘...mistaken not because some other area is “first: but because the notion of philosophy as having foundations is as mistaken as knowledge having foundations.’ Rorty questions both philosophy’s and epistemology’s claim to a status that is able to make judgements about the validity of the knowledge claims of other disciplines. In Rorty’s mind the books of philosophy sit alongside those of history, art and science and all should have the same equally legitimate claims to knowledge providing they express these claims in a well reasoned manner.

The consequences this has for the development of a paradigm with which to shape this research’s methodology is that (given my aim to maintain consistently within a hermeneutic framework) I must necessarily look elsewhere for a starting point. The pragmatic attack on epistemology by both Rorty and Morgan above (remembering the title of Morgan’s paper is in part ‘Pragmatism Regained’) led me not to a mixed methods approach as advised by Morgan however. Rorty, rather more satisfactorily, responds to this challenge by throwing into doubt the usefulness of method at all. One consistent critique that Rorty has made of Dewey in particular, and early pragmatism generally, is their commitment to the scientific method—although Rorty suggests that Dewey in fact never really made it clear what he meant by this.

What Rorty offers instead is hermeneutics with the emphatic proviso that

...I am not putting hermeneutics forward as a “successor” subject to epistemology... [it] is not the name for a discipline, nor for a method of achieving the sort of results which epistemology failed to achieve, nor for a program of research. Rorty suggests that any kind of meaningful knowledge is bound by time and place. He does not believe however that these claims are to be found as a result of the application of a ‘method’ familiar to scientists, but rather are the result of dialogue between rational agents each with the authentic desire to work things out together (just as in Habermas and Gadamer). Central this idea (and as explained in previous chapters) is the fact that we are all enclosed within the hermeneutic circle, from which we all do our best to interpret things as they appear from within the circle, and from that we cope with the world accordingly. Hermeneutics for Rorty is not a search for Truth as much as a rich engagement in culture in all of its manifestations, from which we might have interesting and edifying encounters that make our lives more

234 Ibid., 315.
meaningful. Rorty does not claim this hermeneutic turn as his own; in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* he explicitly credits Gadamer for introducing him the necessity of humans seeing themselves as hermeneutic and meaning-seeking beings, rather than the traditional idea of ourselves as methodical and truth-knowing beings. ²³⁵

Following this hermeneutic turn, from Gadamer I take, for the purposes of methodology, his resistance to method as conceived within the natural sciences. Gadamer writes:

They [his hermeneutic investigations] are concerned to seek the experiences of truth that transcend the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found... the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experience of philosophy, of art, of history itself. ²³⁶

Given that this research seeks to do some of what Gadamer states above, to make sense of my students’ work as they undertake philosophical discussions, it also makes sense that I also look outside of the scientific method for guidelines on which to base my methodological approach. The scientific method within the social sciences might broadly be characterised as concerning a program that seeks to explain human behaviour through close observation and the analysis of resultant measurable collected data. This method is also known as positivism, or more commonly, quantitative research. Its epistemological basis lies firmly within that developed by the natural sciences and relies strongly on scientific techniques and a strictly materialist epistemology. The social scientist working within this paradigm sees human action as behavioural in nature and therefore quantifiable. Consequently, social scientists believe in the possibility of developing universal theories of human behaviour that are based on empirical observation and explanation of collected data. Such research sees ‘...the main task for the social sciences as being the making of causal explanations and the prediction of future behaviour on the study of present behaviour’. ²³⁷ The role of the researcher is described as that of one who is detached, value free and disinterested.

Gadamer, who accepts Heidegger’s characterisation of *Dasein* as interpretive rather than behavioural in nature, of course favours a hermeneutic approach to understanding human being that cannot be accounted for by scientific principles, be they methodological or epistemological. Interpretive or qualitative methods challenge the ability of the scientific approach to either explain or understand human behaviour. Rather than attempt to measure this behaviour using the methods of scientific study, the qualitative researcher seeks to

²³⁵ Ibid., 357-58.
understand human behaviour through a close engagement with, and interpretation of, human actions, beliefs and motivations. These aspects of existence, which lie at the base of human behaviour, are neither measurable, nor even necessarily observable, using the methods of science. Interpretive research places human experience at the locus of its investigation and consequently uses different approaches to investigation in gathering its data. The specific types of qualitative methodologies are many, but they can be broadly divided into two categories; the interpretive which ‘focuses primarily on understanding and accounting for the meaning of human experiences and actions,’ and the critical which ‘focuses on the critique and transformation of current structures, relationships and conditions that shape and constrain the development of social practices.’ This research clearly has a foot in both methodological camps with the addition that in the hermeneutic paradigm (which accounts for both the critical and the interpretive) the researcher recognises her prejudice (in Gadamer’s terms) and explicitly uses it in coming to an understanding of the textual material gathered.

There is one last important point that must be addressed when claiming allegiance to the hermeneutic paradigm, in what is a chapter on methods and methodologies. Given hermeneutic’s rejection of epistemology there is a significant corollary commitment that must necessarily accompany it—the rejection of a specific method of analysis as it is generally conceived in research. There are two particular reasons for this with the first being the viability or otherwise of explicating a hermeneutic ‘method’ as such. The ability to interpret data in the hermeneutic manner is similar in nature to the ability to look at a painting or listen to a piece of music and partake in discussion with, and about, these art works. The point of the talk, which may or may not include other people, is not to fix a Truth in the work, but to find a meaning with the work that is resonant and horizon-changing in some way. The ineffable nature of this engagement makes it impossible to articulate or reduce to propositional terms for the sake of methodological security. I prefer to think of this type of engagement as dispositional in nature. It relies on a type of know-how that can be recognised and performed skillfully but the rules of which cannot necessarily be articulated.

Gadamer articulates a second reason against method as follows:

‘The narrowing of perspective that results from concentrating on method is almost always imperceptible to the scientist. He is always already oriented to the methodological correctness of his procedure – but also, conversely, away from reflection.’

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239 Ibid.
While this statement presents an argument against method in the sciences, it is just as powerful an argument against method more generally when investigating human experience. In order to allow for a genuine openness to all possibilities that that might occur in my students’ philosophical practices, and while I can comfortably describe my methodology (such as it is) as qualitative, I will make no commitments to applying any particular methodical analysis of the material I gather. The necessity of reflection on the transcripts, myself, and the project itself, as well as the meanings gathered from these things, complicates the idea of a method to such an extent that one cannot viably be formulated. I can say however I will bring to it a hermeneutic consciousness that can best described as an orientation towards meaning through engagement with the material and the participants.

**Moving to Practice**

There abounds a great range of definitions of methodology. The term ‘methodology’ can mean the conceptual tools, beliefs or theoretical or philosophical commitments the researcher uses to develop his overarching research structure. Methodology can also mean the design of the practical steps a researcher must make in the research field from moment to moment, and can include the manner by which data is analysed and processed. It is also common to find the two conflated so that methodology contains both philosophical and practical aspects of research design. In my case methodology as underlying principle has been accounted for with the statement of paradigm above. Methodology as practical design, where the instrumental and practical applications of paradigm are described with a view to enacting them in the research field, will be the proper subject of this section. As stated above, my research paradigms, in particular the hermeneutic, mean that a clear statement of methodology of this type will not be possible—thus some of the below is an argument against methodology as such. It is the case however that some aspects of my design can be posited with clarity while other aspects can be described in obtuse terms.

**From Critical Theory to Critical Practice**

Critical theory, with its demand for emancipation, demands that the theoretical agent at some stage acts in some way that enacts his vision of this emancipation. At its basis this research has, as one of its methodological supports, the action research paradigm. Action research is usually presented in strict methodological terms as consisting of a series of delineated specific phases of activity and thought that researchers should undertake. For example The Educational Research and Development Council define actions research as follows:
Educational action research is a term used to describe the identification of strategies of planned action which are implemented, and then systematically submitted to observation, reflection and change. Participants in the action being considered are intricately involved with all of these activities.241 This ongoing process is often represented visually as a spiral or a series of cycles representing the path that the researcher should adhere to from the beginning of the research to its conclusion.242 Important in understanding the tradition of the action research methodology is the fact that the term action research was first coined by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin who ‘... challenged an orthodoxy about the role of the social scientist as the disinterested, ‘objective’ observer of human affairs.’243 Lewin’s background in psychology meant that, despite his resistance to objectivity, his model of research still retained some distinct influences of natural science inquiry; for example the testing and development of hypotheses, the linear path followed by the researcher, the emphasis on observation, and the detailing of findings at the end of the experimental cycle.

It is important at this point to emphasise the fact that that an approach to action research governed by critical theory is differs from this. While action research requires the researcher to affect the field under study with a view to implementing positive change of some description, a critical methodology ‘...articulates a vision of action research, through the use of critical theory, in which teachers are the participants in the project of human emancipation.’244 Critical action research is political thought transcribed into social action (praxis). This emancipatory agenda necessitates reflection on issues that lie both within and outside the classroom that are analysed through reference to the work of political and cultural theorists. It requires the researcher to implement a critique of the political and ethical dimensions of educational practice as well as the practical and technical.

The use of critical action research has substantial precedent in the field of educational studies, with perhaps the best-known example found in the Freire’s work The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,245 in which he described his studies in emancipatory literacy teaching in the 1970s in South America. In this work Freire outlines his efforts in liberating peasants from their impoverishment through a pedagogy in which they came, through a process of dialogical confrontation within ‘circles of power’, to question their socio-economic state rather than accept it as reality. ‘To achieve this goal, the oppressed must confront reality critically,
simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality.' Freire’s motivation in his work was explicitly political and interventionist, and he described his political and philosophical stance in some detail in the book. His stance was one that was partially informed by the theory that underpins the Frankfurt school, a stance that is similar to my own in some respects.

Carr and Kemmis articulate more explicitly a program of critical action research for teachers by defining five important requirements in this approach. They state that such research must:

1. Reject positivist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth.
2. Accept the need to employ interpretive categories of teachers.
3. Provide ways of distinguishing ideologically distorted interpretations from those that are not.
4. Offer theoretical accounts that make teachers aware of how ideology can be eliminated or overcome.
5. Be practical, so that its educational value can be determined by the way it relates to practice.

They highlight the importance of the above five elements by placing them against historical precedents in research and theory in general. The rejection of positivism along with the need for teacher interpretation in (1) and (2) is seen as necessary because positivistic knowledge is instrumental in purpose, value free, and neglects the lived experience of teachers and students. The examination of ideology in (3) is significant as a purely interpretive approach, while acknowledging the lived experiences of the subjects, also treats experience as an absolute condition and not subject to exterior criticism and change. As such it is only capable of transcribing and understanding the consciousnesses of subjects, without any facility to critique any potential distortions. The demand for praxis in (4) and (5) offers teachers methods with which they can reflectively inform and develop professional practice. Neither the positivist nor interpretive approaches explain a method for finding a solution. At best they can only describe a problem as it presents itself within the field of study, or mandate a ‘fix’ that may well be a product of another aspect of restrictive discourse.

A statement of the critical-theoretical perspective I brought to this research has been made in various sections above; broadly examined issues of authority and the possibilities of hermeneutic dialogue in classroom discussions and their relationships to philosophical meaning, truth and agreement. I also drew on Heidegger’s ontological claims of Dasein as a hermeneutic being, in organising classroom structures such that they allowed for this nature to manifest itself in as authentic a manner as possible. This was a reaction to what I saw as the

246 Ibid., 37.
effects of P4C’s use of pragmatism and the traditional Socratic figure so as to represent philosophy as scientific method and concept development, all of which mitigates the possibilities of students fully revealing their hermeneutic being. In these senses I saw my research as oriented towards human freedom in terms of meeting the challenges of both critical theory and hermeneutic philosophy.

The above is a statement of the political motivations behind my research made to justify its ‘critical’ label. There is however another aspect of traditional action research that needs discussion given the paradigmatic clash that exists between hermeneutics and the methodical implications of action research. Such a methodical approach to research would seem to be contrary to the spirit of hermeneutic inquiry which, as Gadamer and others above have said, is not reducible to the pre-planned steps or procedures that are exemplified in the classic looping linearity of the action research cycle. It is here that I would like to once again discuss importance of praxis, and more particularly its intellectual corollary phronesis, in brief detail. Carr writes that ‘... in the culture of modernity, the Aristotelian notion of phronesis has been rendered as obsolete, dialogue has been replaced by technical expertise and historical consciousness has been supplanted by a rigid conformity to methodological rules.’ He is arguing here that action research has had as its motivation, due to its need to emulate methods based on natural sciences, a theory that is applied in practice in an experimental manner. This experimental sub-structure is not entirely hidden by its a commitment to qualitative methods, and therefore the researcher is still at risk of valorising methodical purity, with its emphasis on empirical coherence, over interpretive meaning, which is better able to embrace the unexpected and is reliant on a experientially developed phronesis. Lost in the traditional model of action research is the reflective nature of practical philosophy which sees no separation of theory from practice, but rather a dialogical relationship between the two where practice informs theory and vice versa. In this way they are seen as being in some ways indistinguishable. This research then is did not take theory as a given in order to test its applicability in a methodical way. What I did was inspired by a few basic ideas that oriented my thinking in such a way that I was open to some new possibilities in the way I went about my research.

From Philosophical Hermeneutics to Phronesis

Carr’s answer to the challenge he finds presented to action research by the exigencies of method is found in hermeneutics and the practical wisdom it entails:

However, once action research is prepared to expand its own ‘historical horizons’—once, that is, it is prepared to make its own implicit acceptance of the dominant beliefs of modernity explicit—then it should become increasingly apparent why action research can only be made intelligible as a mode of inquiry that aspires to create and nurture the kind of dialogical communities within which phronesis can be embedded and which the development of praxis presupposes and requires...

There are several aspects to Carr’s answer that deserve some explanation from within the hermeneutic context that encircles this research, as these should be an essential part of any research design of the hermeneutic type. Important to any hermeneutic investigation is the development of a historical consciousness in relation to the object of study—one that sees its moment in time not as separate from history but as a result of historical forces that are acting on it. The proper understanding of phenomena requires that this historical horizon is investigated and explicated as the background from which the phenomenon emerges. This understanding of horizon must be explicitly ‘effective’ in that it merges with the researcher’s horizon in some way and ‘affects’ her through a merging of experiences and beliefs, resulting in development of understanding. The opposite of this, ineffective history, is merely a collation of facts that have no impact on the researcher. An adjunct to this of course is the horizon of the researcher herself, something that is critical throughout all aspects of the research given that this horizon is its primary shaping force. Rather than, in case of positivist designs, this horizon being ignored or mitigated as much as possible the researcher should properly make her personal history, be it professional, personal, cultural or otherwise as explicit as possible in order to foreground her prejudice.

Next Carr emphasises the importance of dialogical communities in meaning making. Hermeneutics uses the term dialogue to mean a range of things; the talk between people, a group of people experiencing an artwork, or an investigation by an individual of some material or idea. What is critical though in the hermeneutic sense of dialogue that it has a transformative effect where the human subject is affected by the exchange, and her horizon of understanding is modified and merged with the other in some way. Finally Carr emphasises the quality of phronesis; a type of practical wisdom that can be developed only through experience in the field and cannot be reduced to method of knowledge development. This type of wisdom is particularly to be found in engaging and transformative dialogue; a type of
exchange that is resistant to rule development and emerges amongst groups of people possessing an authentic desire to understand each other. The hermeneutic method encourages

...the development of universal rules to guide ethically committed action in particular situations as dependent on the practical discourse of a community of inquiry rather than individuals acting and reflecting in isolation from each other. This is quite consistent with Aristotle’s notion of phronesis. It is a form of reasoning that embodies a democratic and foundationless rationality that is free from the constraints of methodology.250

Hermeneutics can account for not just the rationality of a group conversation and the development of phronesis, but the ethically oriented praxis that critical action research demands.

The use of phronesis methodologically extends further than an understanding of the unwritten rules of dialogue, and should properly account for all other aspects of the research design. Smythe et al. agree that ‘[t]o research in a Heideggerian hermeneutical manner is to recognise that phronesis is the predominant mode of being,’251 and in their paper they have similar difficulties with the concept of mandating method within a hermeneutic research design. Instead they describe a collection of proficiencies, ideas and dispositions that the researcher should seek to develop through the course of his research work. These include ‘Captured by a thought’, ‘The unutterable circle of writing’, ‘Openness’ and ‘Graced moments’.

In the context of my discussion of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s hermeneutics in previous chapters, these are practically self-explanatory given their titles alone. ‘The unutterable circle of writing’ for example demands that the researcher writes her way through difficult data in a philosophical manner so that meaning can emerge (in a manner suggestive of the hermeneutic circle), while ‘Graced moments’ calls to mind those instances when an intuitive truth reveals itself and harmonises with and builds upon our world-view. Together these concepts provide not a hermeneutic method per se but a way forward into research that is neither rule bound nor anarchic. They are however very challenging in their demands for a personal engagement unalloyed by method.

A Critical-Hermeneutic Design

With the above theories and philosophies juxtaposed, a coherent and practical research design can be articulated; not necessarily in terms of methodical steps or specific modes of data analysis in the manner of a typical methodology, but rather in terms of guiding principles that

are adequate for guiding practice. What is important though to remember is the significance of *phronesis* in this design; it meant that the manner in which I went about my research developed as I went about the research. I anticipated that significant aspects of my practical approach would only emerge whilst I was in action and able reflect on this action—both when I worked with my students, when I interpreted the data and when I further developed my philosophical and practical knowledge of a critical-hermeneutic approach. Broadly though the below are the principles and goals that governed this research:

- All actions and research directions were governed by emancipatory principles
- A historical examination and review of P4C practice was undertaken
- A practical application of a model of hermeneutic philosophical discussion was developed
- Rigorous determination and expression of my subjectivity (life-world) was expressed
- Theory and practice was integrated so that neither had hegemonic control
- Interpretive categories and insights regarding the data were developed as research progressed
- A willingness to follow the research direction rather than stick to a pre-determined methodological pathway was demonstrated
- Qualitative methods were used to collect data

This can be seen as a checklist with which my actions, at least preliminarily, could be assessed in terms of their consistency to my paradigmatic and practical commitments. A such it contains some recommendations towards direct action (for example a historical review of P4C) but more generally it demanded of me certain dispositions, orientations and the development over time of certain types of knowledge that owed their allegiance to my interpretation of hermeneutics and critical theory.

**Capturing and Understanding**

The above checklist made specific demands on both the types of data that I collected as well as the manner in which I came to an understanding of this data. In my demand that there be a overarching consistency in all that I did I agree with Nielsen that ‘[t]here ought to be a strong correlation between the mode of inquiry, and the mode of presenting the findings of that
inquiry.252 The above demanded that my data collection methods were qualitative—that they had a humanistic and immediate content that was not mediated by instrumental reduction to numbers, charts or behavioural categories. Silverman253 describes three basic types of data available to the qualitative researcher; observations made by the researcher, discussions with the participants and analysis of texts related to or created within the research domain. To ensure trustworthiness I gathered and analysed data in each of these areas. The data collected represented evidence of three aspects of the research program. Student work samples, both written and oral, were intended as evidence of the fact that my program, when implemented, could demonstrably result in the development of hermeneutic thinking in students. This meant the collection of student work in several forms. Recordings of conversations were made during class sessions and later transcribed by myself. Student work samples were also collected, which took the form of photocopies or digital copies of work. In addition, when presenting the work in the Analysis and Discussion chapter, I added considerable analytic and interpretive observations and comments. These were interspersed with student work so that their hermeneutic content could be revealed.

Interpreting the Discussions

It is at the point of data analysis that a hermeneutic approach to qualitative research distinguishes itself from other approaches. While many other methods use qualitative data collection types, they will frequently rely on a method of data analysis or reduction in order to come to an understanding of its content. There are a range of frameworks that have been used by researchers in the analysis of philosophical, critical and higher order thinking conversations that have a qualitative aspect. Daniel et al.254 developed a grid of dialogical critical thinking skills in their analysis of transcripts that defined a developmental taxonomy of thinking skills as evidenced in talk. Murphy255 developed a critical thinking instrument, based on the models of other researchers, in which she defined five phases or moments in thinking and used it to analyse online discussions. Panko and McLoughlin256 examined the use of three separate content analysis tools in their assessment of high order thinking, once again in online

254 Daniel et al., “Dialogical Critical Thinking: Elements of Definitions Emerging in the Analysis of Transcripts from Pupils Aged 10 to 12 Years.”
discussions. But while each of these models offers some assistance in the assessment of discussions, they lack categories that relate specifically to hermeneutic thinking. More importantly, they are epistemologically dissonant with this research. I believe that hermeneutic conversation proper would fail to be captured by any attempt to ‘grid skills’, ‘assess higher order thinking’ or ‘define phases’. Each of these models suggests strongly to me that the researchers are trying to capture human interaction and thinking in a reductive manner—a goal that I believe is flawed in its conception. Along with Heidegger I agree that:

> Whenever a phenomenological [or in this case hermeneutic] concept is drawn from primordial sources, there is a possibility that it may degenerate if communicated in the form of an assertion. It gets understood in an empty way and is passed on, losing its indigenous character and becoming a free-floating thesis.

If I replace ‘assertion’ in the above quote with ‘analytical category’ my argument against a method of analysis becomes clearer. The labelling of a contribution by a student as belonging to a particular category of utterance might leave it at that it without necessarily making it understood – and its ‘indigenous character’ can become lost. There is however a middle ground that can be found that avoids simplistic labelling, while acknowledging a specific hermeneutic idea or concept. Hermeneutic research calls for something different from the researcher when texts produced by students are to be understood. Without reliance on method, another relationship must be developed between the texts gathered, the producers of those texts and myself as the researcher. Smyth et al. suggest for example that understanding of texts can develop through a researcher’s own writing about the texts, a writing that does not stop at the first attempt at analysis. They write that:

> To work with the data is to listen for the ideas that jump out, to hear what is being said in one’s own writing, to think and read and think again over the same ground, to go back and forth between ‘everything’. The researchers let thinking go in whatever direction feels right but to somehow capture the thinking that emerges. It is to write and to re-write. It is to let the thinking emerge without knowing where one is going.

This is perfectly consistent with the idea of a hermeneutic dialogue that opens itself towards understanding, in that it is an exchange of ideas between researcher and text that ‘plays’ with meaning until something meaningful emerges. There is the possibility of a framework that might emerge, which can be applied in this approach to understanding, but it demands of the researcher a rigorous attention and repeated returning to the collected texts. My writing about the texts was the primary way in which I developed understanding of them and communicated this to the reader. In my work with the student discussions and writing, I

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257 Heidegger, Being and Time, 60-61.
incorporated within the transcripts a rich and developing commentary about them that gradually revealed their hermeneutic character through an integration of analysis and discussion. Part of this research was the development of a practical understanding that enabled me to recognise and develop hermeneutic discussion through a dialogue with the texts produced by students—but this was not reducible to a step-by-step method of analysis. In this way it was the researcher (myself as teacher) who developed the interpretive skills to analyse the produced texts.

**Trustworthiness and Resonance**

There remains a suspicion lingering within some research circles about the worth of work undertaken within a qualitative design. ‘In the last two decades the issue of rigour (initially referred to as reliability and validity) in qualitative research has persisted as an hegemonic legacy of empirical-analytical research, and continues to challenge new researchers as they shift from a conventional empirical-analytical paradigm to alternative paradigms.’ These suspicions are largely due to the nature of qualitative design and the fact that it has deliberately been developed as a reaction against the quantitative; with its reductive nature of data analysis, limited scope of data types, instrumental nature of its processes, denaturalised settings and disinterested stances of researchers. Reliability has typically been measured in the term of the above characteristics, few of which relate to qualitative research generally, and none of which can be applied to my research. Given my hermeneutic-critical design, with its deliberate engagement with the subjects, its natural setting, and its unmethodical nature of textual understanding, the ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ of my study must be established using values more appropriate to such a design. The term ‘reliability’ itself is first of all inappropriate for this research given its foundation in quantitative research design and measurement in the sciences more generally. ‘Validity’ as well is a term used in logic to measure the coherence of a deductive argument when its conclusion is analysed in terms of its premises. Given that no claims to universal logical truths are being made, and no measurements are taken in a hermeneutic design, both of these terms need to be replaced with language consistent to this approach. So given the fact that what I did was to demonstrate students’ ability to engage in hermeneutic practices, the below quote offers several useful suggestions in developing a general standard of trustworthiness for this research that is important to establish. Moss writes that

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A hermeneutic approach... might be warranted by criteria like a reader’s extensive knowledge of the learning context; multiple and varied sources of evidence; an ethic of disciplined, collaborative inquiry that encourages challenges and revisions to initial interpretations; and the transparency of the trail of evidence leading to the interpretations, which allows users to evaluate the conclusions for themselves.\textsuperscript{260}

She makes several points that are worth highlighting. First of all the researcher’s ‘extensive knowledge’ of the students, the school and the educational context in which the learning and researching is taking place is seen as an advantage in interpreting the work of the students rather than a challenge to objectivity. Next she acknowledges the importance of a critical analysis of interpretation that must surround the researcher’s interpretations, along with a return to the interpretations that take place over time. And finally she stresses the importance of a coherent pathway of knowledge and decision making that is made explicit to the research’s audience; one that enables the audience to make their own judgments about the interpretive conclusions of the researcher. To this Whitehead adds:

\begin{quote}
The trustworthiness of a study can be endorsed if: the researcher describes and interprets their experience (credibility); readers consider that the study is transferable to another context and are able to follow the decision trail of the researcher throughout the study (dependability)... Findings should be informed by attention to praxis and reflexivity, understanding how one’s experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world, including during inquiry.\textsuperscript{261}
\end{quote}

This emphasises the role of the researcher who acts as an \textit{active presence} within the research, who makes this presence known, and who conducts and explains the research in such a way that other educators find value in its conclusions. Put together, all the above are consistent with a hermeneutic-critical approach to research design, and most have already been accounted for in my guiding principles above. In addition however I have described and explained the following in the form of a decision trail:

1. Discussed my professional background and belief horizon (Chapters One and Two)
2. Used an extensive variety of textual sources to establish student practices (Chapter Four)
3. Justified my research design decisions from a deep level with reference to a paradigm (current chapter)
4. Produced a record of events, data collection dates and participants (current chapter).


5. Made explicit my hermeneutic commitments when interpreting data (Chapter Four)

The last question that needed to be addressed is that of transferability. This presented the challenge to me of whether I had established, through my research, the certainty that its conclusions provided ‘facts’ that could be applied in other settings or by other educators. Once again this language reflects the aspirations of quantitative design and was inappropriate for my purposes. Along with Smyth et al. I agree that my ‘...quest is therefore not to prove or disprove, not to provide irrefutable evidence but rather to provoke thinking towards the mystery of what ‘is’. To this end I hope that this work will be useful to others, but not necessarily in a way that I can anticipate. The phrase ‘transferability’ is often used in this respect, and while it doesn’t jar as much as ‘validity,’ it is still does not correctly describe what I achieved with this work. I prefer the term ‘resonance’ as a support for trustworthiness.

Generally it means that sense or feeling of something encountered that meshes well with something already known, so that while learning is taking place, the familiar is also encountered. It is reflective, as well, of the way that fore-knowledge is required for understanding. It is an openness to the new that also reflects the old. In this way, should my research resonate with an audience, they will find it useful in a practical worldly sense but only because it is reflective to some extent of their dispositions and beliefs about education.

**Research Participant Choice and Ethics**

Given the fact that I was a practising teacher with a job in a high school, there was the obvious opportunity for me to engage in naturalistic inquiry with my own students. I was, at different times, a teacher of junior and senior English, philosophy, and literature, as well as a university tutor during the course of this research. Each of these experiences were appropriate, in various ways, for the introduction and practise of hermeneutic inquiry. In fact, one of my aims was to demonstrate my belief that philosophical discussion was not only for philosophy classrooms. I finally chose to use work generated in a Year 10 English class in 2010, along with the work from a year 11 Literature class in 2011. The reasons for this were both practical as well as intentional.

1. My initial empirical work, due largely to an inadequate understanding of hermeneutics, was unsuccessful (detailed below). Due to other work commitments it took two years to generate an improved theoretical approach.

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2. I was teaching only one year 10 English class in 2010, at which time I felt better prepared to undertake quality empirical research.

3. These students, when I presented them with the possibility of involvement in research, were enthusiastic about the idea, and a large majority of the class gave ethics permission.

4. Many of the students in year 11 Literature (2011) had been in my year 10 (2010) class.

5. Most P4C materials and practices are aimed at students of this age and below, and so these classes presented a fair comparison of approaches.

There was an immediate and contentious aspect in asking my own students to participate in my research—that of an informed and non-coercive consent. While this issue is significant in any type of research where human participants are involved, in a critically oriented program, where issues of power present one of the aspects of study, the problem of involvement and consent was highlighted. I agree therefore that ‘...action research [is] more risky because of the power differential between researchers and participants who may also be positioned as instructors and students.... For educational action researchers, it is a daunting task to manage and balance the teaching and researching components.' In the first instance I had an ethical responsibility (in line with critical action research) to ensure that the participants’ voices were heard, that they had some control over the research direction, and that there was an emancipatory outcome to the research. In the second instance, and common to all field based research, my ethical responsibility lay in ensuring that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and subject to participant withdrawal at any time.

Research undertaken in Victorian government schools for higher degree studies must meet a series of ethical demands and responsibilities, as does research undertaken for The University of Melbourne. Together these institutions require that ethics approval or permission was granted from:

1. The University of Melbourne Human Ethics Research Committee [Appendix 10]
2. The Department of Education and Training [Appendix 11]
3. The School [Appendix 12]
4. The students and parents of the students [Appendix 13]

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Each of these requirements were met in turn and copies of the appropriate letters and permissions can be found in the appendices indicated. Given this extensive series of permissions sought and received, I was able to account for any ethical issues that may occur. Of particular note was the fact that another more senior teacher introduced the proposal to students and emphasised its voluntary nature, and that each student separately had the choice to opt into the research and obtain parental permission.

**Timeline, Participant Data and Research Field**

The time taken to conduct the field research for this study was considerable, and longer than originally anticipated. Although the research was have to have been completed in one year, my findings in this first year suggested that further background reading was required in order to address some of the issues revealed. In this year (2007) I worked with a year 8 English class. Data collected in this initial work was not used in the final analysis. This experience led to some refinements that were put into practice the following year in my year 11 philosophy class (2008) but, to my mind, my ideas were again too sketchily conceived and did not present sound results. There were also a low number of participants who gave permission to take part in the study, and so this data was also eventually not used. The following year (2009) I changed roles at the school (in taking on a leadership position) and was unable to complete any fieldwork or other research. In 2010 I once again was able to devote more time to study by going to work part time. I was able to work with my year ten English class for much of the middle part of the year, at which time I collected the main body of data used in the analysis chapter. Of the twenty-four students in the year 10 class, nineteen students gave me permission to use their work. Many of these same students were then to become my VCE year 11 Literature students the following year (2011). This enabled me to continue the collection of data. Several additional students (not originally in my year 10 class) gave me permission to use their work at this time, although I eventually only used the work of two additional students (see Appendix 14 for list of students and classes).

For the purpose of this study all students were assigned gender-appropriate pseudonyms as required in my ethics approval. The data collected in my year 10 English class consisted of two types: recorded conversations of class discussions that I then transcribed, and scans of students writing which I word-processed for purposes of clarity and editing. This was collected during terms two and three of 2010 (12th April – 3rd September). The discussions took place generally on a weekly basis, while occasionally there would be two discussions, and twenty-six discussions in all were transcribed. The written work samples were collected as required and consisted of poetry, justifications for this work, and general reflections on the
conversations held at their completion. The units and texts taught at this time were ‘modernist Poetry’ and ‘Of Mice and Men.’ The data collected in my year 11 literature class (2011) was of one type: weekly blog entries made following class discussions. These I later copied directly from the class blog for use in the analysis section. This data was collected during the first term of 2011 (1st February – 1st April), during which a unit on ‘Pride and Prejudice’ was taught. Copies of transcripts and work used were given to students in both classes for approval for final use. No students withdrew permission or chose not to have a particular piece of work included (see Appendix 15 for details of transcription and work collection schedule).

I spent 2012-2014 completing the analytical work and the thesis overall. The research was conducted at a medium sized (approximately 450 students) high school in the inner suburbs of an Australian capital city. The school has a reputation for innovative approaches to middle-years education, and was most welcoming of my research proposal. At the commencement of my research I had been a teacher there for five years and had taught a range of subjects, primarily in the areas of English, literature and philosophy.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter constitutes the empirical part of my thesis. Here I demonstrate the exploration and development of hermeneutic practices in my students, primarily through a series of extensive conversations collected according to the schedule in Appendix 15. I also regularly refer to excerpts of student analytical and creative writing. In each of the following sections I identify a particular hermeneutic attribute, skill or understanding I have identified in philosophical hermeneutics. The excerpts are not presented chronologically but rather in terms of ideas and themes. When worked together they exhibit a comprehensive demonstration of hermeneutic practices that exemplifies my alternative to P4C.

I will briefly discuss the manner in which data reduction was undertaken. I was required to reduce approximately 30 hours of conversations, and several months worth of written work across two classes, to a coherent account of a hermeneutic practice. Due to the methodological commitments outlined in the previous chapter, I was not able to necessarily anticipate, or mandate, the growth or shape of these practices. I was always conscious that my students were not to be the ‘instruments’ of a new method of philosophising, but that we were to work towards an understanding of hermeneutic practices together. In order to illustrate the often tangential and exploratory nature of the conversations I had with students, I have included, as Appendix 6, an example of an unedited transcript in which this is evident. This particular transcript is used as it was the last recorded, and is referred to below in the section ‘Effective-Historical Consciousness’. It acts as a demonstration of the manner in which I focussed on and discussed key conversational moments as they reflected hermeneutic ideas.

In this transcript you can read evidence of the fact that the students and I developed our hermeneutic awareness together. There are examples of questions from myself that did not work and that confused the students. There are examples of avenues of investigation that I had to abandon due to lack of interest from students. There are also examples of discussion threads where I followed student interests, although it was not necessarily germane to my research. You can also see the notes and annotations I made to myself when later reflecting on the data. Finally you can see where I have removed contributions by those students who did not give me permission to use their work. Most importantly however, as I demonstrate in the section ‘Effective-Historical Consciousness’, you can see you how the students and I came to understand important hermeneutic ideas together.

It is in this way that I decided on the work samples below as they reflected our joint explorations. I have already described in the previous chapter the fact that my first two efforts at developing a hermeneutic variation of P4C were unsuccessful. In the case of the two classes...
below however I changed my approach, and thought to learn hermeneutics with the students, rather than pre-prepare a course. The analyses below present an iterative approach to fieldwork, in which I would work with students on an idea, sometimes repeatedly, and reflect on the conversations as I later transcribed them. I was also undertaking a substantial amount of reading while this was going on. This would then assist my students and myself in developing a keener understanding of hermeneutic philosophy and practice. The sections below are too abridged (for necessary reasons of word length) to show the complexity and circularity of this process. They have been chosen instead to exhibit the highlights of an emergent hermeneutic practice.

Language and Dialogue
In this early excerpt, taken from Transcript 4, I conduct some explicit teaching using the Socratic method around the hermeneutic idea of ‘language’. I begin by asking Amelia to read out a short passage that makes a particular claim about discussion and truth. Throughout this dialogue with students I have in mind a particular idea I want them to understand—that hermeneutic experience takes place in the medium of an agreed-to and shared language.

Amelia  [reads from sheet] Truth claims can ultimately be decided only through critical discussion and not through a direct appeal to sense certainty.

Me  So what’s that saying? What’s it actually mean?

Charlie  It’s saying that you can’t just take someone’s word for it.

Me  Excellent, it’s saying that you just can’t take someone’s word for it… What else is it saying?

Sienna  Sort of like you can’t just know something. Even if you feel like it’s correct you still need to analyse it and sort of like criticise it.

Me  That’s an excellent thought Sienna, you can’t just know something. And that’s what it means by sense certainty. Is that what you were thinking Sienna when you said that?

Sienna  Mmm.

Me  What does sense certainty mean there?

Sienna  I guess it’s like having an inkling that something’s correct. I don’t know, sense certainty.

Me  Yeah that’s great, yes. What else might it mean? What’s a sense?

At this point Sienna has guessed at the meaning of ‘sense certainty’ but is incorrect in her understanding. I encourage the class to further explore the possible meanings of the phrase.
Zoe: It's like a sensation of certainty.... They could be talking about the five senses. But I don't think they are.

Me: I think they are.

Zoe: Oh really.

Me: I think you’re right.

Here Zoe has (nearly incidentally) approximated the meaning of the phrase ‘sense certainty‘ more accurately. I pick up on this, even though she is unsure that she is correct, and encourage her and the class to further pursue this meaning. Bella then continues this line of inquiry with encouragement from me.

Bella: I guess kind of like the what your brain puts together and the evidence you can say...

Me: Yes.

Bella: ...and then tries to make sense of it.

Me: Now let’s get back to what Charlie was talking about. Remind us what you said Charlie.

Charlie: That you can’t just take someone’s word for it. If they say oh, but I know that that table’s blue, well ok the table’s blue that’s it. There’s no [interruption]

Me: Sorry Charlie, I missed the last bit there.

Charlie: Yeah, you just can’t take someone’s word for it. I used the example of the table. If someone says the table’s blue, you can’t say just because they said that ah, it’s blue.

Me: Why not, why can’t you. That seems sensible to me.

Here, although Charlie’s answer is essentially correct, I play the devil’s advocate and ask of the class further elucidation of the demand that truth claims require more than simple assertions.

Bella: Well, do we all see the same thing? Am I thinking that this is orange, or is it really blue?

Charlie: It’s probably a bad example. Like saying yesterday I met Tom Cruise and had a latte with him. How would you guys know whether I’m telling the truth or not? Unless I had evidence or something...

- [...

Charlie: I’ll get Tom Cruise to come in...

Sienna: How do we know it’s not a lookalike. Every popular celebrity has a look alike.
Charlie: I’ll make sure to bring along his birth certificate too.

While the above bears some relevance to the understanding I want the students to arrive at, the various efforts at ascertaining the level of evidence required here to justify the ‘Tom Cruise’ claim are not relevant. Below I redirect the inquiry towards the use of language in making truth claims. I remind the class about Bella’s example of the orange pencil.

Me: Let’s go back to what Bella said about the orange pencil case.
Sienna: [joking] You mean the purple pencil case.
Me: Did you say the purple pencil case?
Sienna: [laughing] Yes. I was joking. I know it’s orange.
- [chatter]

Here Sienna makes an intelligent observation in the form of a joke. From this it is clear that she already understands the point that I am guiding the class towards—that a subjective ‘sense certainty’ alone is not a sufficient basis with which to use language in dialogue. At this point a fortuitous contribution from Lily develops and explains this idea in terms that class immediately grasps.

Lily: Each person interprets the wave lengths of light that reach your eye so even though we go...
Me: Lily just stop for a moment, I want you to start from the very beginning.

It is immediately clear to me the direction Lily is taking, and the value her contribution will make. Aware of this, I ask her to stop and start again ensuring that the whole class is listening. Note her use of the word ‘interpretation’ as well.

Lily: So it’s the wavelengths that we perceive and everyone sees them differently so, in someone else’s brain, colours of the world might be completely different. But because when you’re young you’re taught this colour is red, this is blue, this is orange. So you know that that is the colour, but it’s not the same. If your brain was transplanted into someone else’s it would be different.
Me: That’s one argument.
Sienna: Oh my god, that’s so weird.
Bella: I don’t get it.
Sophie  It's because it's the way it's in your head, it's not necessarily processing the same thing in everyone else's.

-  

Bella  So basically we could all have a different perception of how the world looks to us.

Lily  Yes.

Charlie  So I could think that that's purple-

Sienna  except that you would call it orange.

-  

Me  Aren't you saying though Lily that the light waves hit us the same but our brains might process it differently.

Lily  Yeah.

At this point the class is instructing each other on the point both Lily and I am trying to make. Sophie understands the idea and explains it to Bella, who initially expressed some confusion, and then Sienna completes Charlie’s sentence to draw the idea to a conclusion. My next contribution to the dialogue is one where I ask the students to draw the two significant ideas together; the first being that of a scientific explanation of private vision, and the second being that of public language.

Me  We're not moving on. We're joining together Zoe and Charlie here. How is it that we come to decide that's orange. Even though, as Zoe said, we actually see a different colour. How do we come to that point?

Sienna  Because people have told us that and we've taken it to be true.

This is a reasonable response but I am looking for an idea such as ‘agreement’ or ‘negotiation’. I probe for further suggestions about this decision to call a certain colour ‘orange’.

Me  People have told us that. How else have we come to-

Charlie  

-  

Well, everyone.

Does everyone agree that that's orange? At the table.

-  

[general chatter]

Charlie  We all agree that it's some form of orange.

Group  [variously] Yes

-  

[...]

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Charlie immediately provides the answer I was looking for in leading the class to approve of his use of the word ‘agree’. At this point I am satisfied with the class’s understanding and the dialogue is drawn to a close.

Discussion
In this excerpt I am illustrating two related ideas that have hermeneutic significance; that of the centrality of language and dialogue to hermeneutic experience. While the above illustrates these ideas only crudely, as the class developed the significance of these ideas became more apparent to us, and equally we became more adept at negotiating our use of language. Over and above this I will first make some quick observations about my pedagogic method. It is clear that I had specific learning outcomes in mind when beginning the class, though I was less sure about how I might achieve those outcomes. Here my method is distinctly Socratic, but exactly what that may mean is less certain. As an initial comparison there are two distinct views of Socrates’ method; one of which holds that he was genuinely the ‘midwife’ to others’ ideas, while the other sees him as a strategic operator who directed dialogue towards predetermined ends. I discussed these two views earlier in my literature review, and hold that they are both credible interpretations. Gadamer, however, very clearly sees him not as a ‘strategiser’ and but as a model for hermeneutic discussion. The point here, however, is that in the above transcript I am very deliberately using the *strategic* Socrates as my model, as I am directing students towards a specific outcome, which is a ‘fact’ about language that I want them to understand. As such I am not, in this *dialogue*, using the hermeneutic mode of Socratic teaching for conversation.

This brings me to the first idea I am illustrating here in a *negative* sense, or at least one element of it—that being the uses of the terms *dialogue*, *conversation*, and *discussion*. The words are occasionally used interchangeably throughout the literature on hermeneutics, both in Gadamer’s work and that about his work, but the meaning intended by the terms is clearer when they come under closer scrutiny. For Gadamer,
We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct.264

In the above excerpt it is clear that I am ‘conducting’ the content and direction of the students’ exchanges, and so it is equally clear that it is not a ‘genuine conversation’ according to this definition. In this I agree, while remembering that a genuine conversation was not my intention. Returning to the terms listed above I will, for the further purpose of this work, use the word ‘dialogue’ when the exchange I am conducting has a specific strategic purpose and is undertaking the work of a conceptual inquiry as is typical of P4C. Hermeneutics does necessarily preclude this type of occasional work. While it is the case that in this dialogue I integrated students’ ideas, allowed them to find their own way to the outcome I was seeking, and encouraged them in the construction of their own understanding, it is equally the case that there is very little of the hermeneutic quality of conversation in the dialogue.

The second idea illustrated here in the positive sense is that of the importance of language to hermeneutic experience. The realisation of this importance for the students was the predetermined outcome I planned for the session, as I wanted to ensure that the students were ‘...aware that language as the medium of understanding must be consciously created by an explicit mediation. This kind of explicit process is undoubtedly not the norm in a conversation.’265 A first minor point to be made is to examine Gadamer’s use of the word ‘conversation’ in the above quote. In doing so he is making a distinction between conversation and dialogue, the term he used in the first quote. To partake in discussion, something that demands the ‘...refraining from “one’s own fancies” or “notions that happen to be at hand,” the refraining from the moveable set pieces of everyday conversation and its schemata and clichés,266 and to be able to distinguish between the two modes of communication is an important task in hermeneutics. Dialogue has a particular method and intention that hermeneutic conversation does not have, and so for the purposes of this work I will use the two terms intentionally and discretely. Having said this it should be noted that Gadamer uses all three terms (at least in translation) interchangeably.

The second important idea I want to explore using the above transcript is that the language the class chooses to use when discussing ideas must itself be made contentious and problematic, so that they are aware of the importance of holding it up ‘consciously’ as a subject of discussion and ‘explicit mediation’. If we take the goal of hermeneutics to be the understanding of being, and we agree that this understanding must have language as its

265 Ibid., 386.
medium, then it is clear that some effort must be made to first realise the significance of language as this medium, and then devise ways of approaching this effort fruitfully. The students above, through my strategic work, realise that none of them have the access required to compare their private experiences with that of the others in the group when referenced by words (which in this example are colours). They reject any hope of being able to do so after Lily’s explanation of vision, which Sophie summarises by saying ‘it’s because it’s the way it’s in your head.’ The students also understand that it is incumbent on them to grasp the significance of the fact that at some point they have either been ‘told’ to use particular public words when referencing the world, or they have ‘agreed’ to their use. We must remember at this point that Gadamer rejected Dilthey’s earlier project of hermeneutics as a psychological exploration of the ‘true’ intentions of the author and his text. In the same way, in the above example, I showed students that language is not a mirror of the mind or nature, and that hermeneutics does not reflect either an internal or external reality. Where I summarise the group’s work above by saying ‘…that what we see as facts in the world aren’t just personal things, they’re things that we’ve talked about,’ I am making this point based on a firm understanding of the importance of shared language in hermeneutic and philosophical thinking.

**Conversation and Fusion of Horizons**

In comparison to the model of dialogue presented above, I present Transcript 15 in which students explicitly theorise about the nature of hermeneutic conversation and its intention. I begin by asking students their thoughts on the experience of our conversational work.

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*Me*  ...*What do you think of when you think of a ninja circle*?

*Emily*  *Discussing ideas and opinions and stuff about certain topics that are brought up. Like belly buttons.*

*Liam*  *Interpretation.*

*Me*  *Say more about that Liam.*

*Liam*  *The one that comes to mind when you think about English, and especially ninja circles and interpretation is, especially with Of Mice and Men, people interpreted things just slightly differently. Everyone else’s view was different. And you start to get people arguing about things cause they see it in different ways. And they’re all right.*

*Lily*  *Not really arguing, more debating.*

*Me*  *What’s the difference Lily, between arguing and debating?*

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267 A ‘ninja circle’ is the name the students gave to our hermeneutic conversations, which took place with students seated in a circle.
Lily  Debating is more on the subject, whereas arguing is more personal... I feel a ninja circle is more a debate than an argument.

Emily  I think it's weird how we're arguing about whether we argue.

General  Yeah.

At this point the students have had a few month’s experience of hermeneutic discussions without explicit theorising. Liam makes the connection between these discussions and interpretation, where the intention is to examine views and difference when discussing texts. Lily is then able to explain the first significant difference between what she calls a debate and an argument, where for her one is subject oriented while the other is participant oriented. In my work with this group previously I have emphasised that the conversational ‘gaze’ must always be object directed. Emily then comments on the meta-dialogical quality of the discussion itself, which I draw everyone’s attention to.

-  [Discussion about idea of ‘loudness’ and ‘argument’]
Lily  In an argument there’s a disagreement of some kind, whereas in a dialogue it could be just like Oh, how are you. I’m good thanks, isn’t the weather nice today. It doesn’t have to be this is right, no this is right.

Jack  Dialogue can be an argument.

Liam  An argument is just one slice.

Oliver  But if you just say dialogue it implies that it is completely neutral.

-  [Further discussion]
Me  I want us to join argument and dialogue together.

Zoe  But we are.

Jack  Can we have an argument about that?

Zoe  Didn’t we just agree that an argument was a part of dialogue when we’re speaking?

Me  I don’t want you to think of dialogue as two people talking about the weather. You’re quite right Zoe, that is a dialogue. But I want a different type of dialogue.

Emily  You want a dialogue where people are arguing.

Me  Yes, but without what Jack is talking about, which is the loud voices.

Sophie  Do you mean dialogue, as in discussion?

Me  Yes

At this point the class, as well as myself, are still working towards some agreement about the correct terms we should use to distinguish the various manners in which groups converse. In
the excerpt above it could be argued I incorrectly use ‘dialogue’ where in fact I should be using ‘discussion’ or ‘conversation’. Gadamer and his commentators however frequently use the terms interchangeably. It is Sophie that recognises my ‘error’ and who corrects me—a correction I readily acknowledge. I want students to examine the ground between ‘argument’ and ‘two people talking about the weather’ in order to come to some conclusions about the quality of hermeneutic conversation. At various points below the terms dialogue and discussion or conversation are used interchangeably, but it is clear in the conversation around these terms that the correct intentions for the terms are developing. After some further talk around these ideas, Ava reflects on the quality of the discussion underway with reference to the content of the discussion.

Ava  Don’t you think that what we’re doing now is perfect?
Me  [joking] I would give it about a 9 ½ out of 10.
General  [chatter]
Me  What do you think’s perfect about it Ava?
Ava  Well, we’re exchanging thoughts and opinions but we’re doing it very politely.
Me  Yes, and there’s a lot of listening, and there’s none of this I think, I think, I think, I think, where people aren’t connecting their ideas to other people’s ideas. I agree with Ava, it’s just about perfect, you’re building on other people’s ideas and things like that. [...]  
Jack  People can have a dialogue about trying to find something out.
Me  That’s true, dialogue means lots of things…
Jack  I like Oliver’s previous thing with dialogue, he said two or more people conversing.
Me  But they could still be talking about something trivial.
Oliver  Well this is a discussion.

Ava is correct in saying that people are ‘exchanging thoughts and opinions’ but I want to ensure that what she means by ‘exchange’ is the listening, building on, and understanding the views of others, i.e. the fusion of horizons. This is in contrast to the relativistic and undisciplined free-for-all that I am criticising when I say ‘there’s none of this I think, I think, I think, I think.’ Oliver then recognises the distinction between Jack’s contribution to the definition of dialogue (trying to find something out), and what is going on in the class at the moment, which is a discussion in which there is no particular ‘finding out’ of something in the manner of a Lipman P4C concept-oriented dialogue. Sophie continues this distinction below.
Me  ...There should be an agreement at some point. Even if it’s I understand what you’re saying but I disagree with you still.

Zoe  There doesn’t really have to be an agreement. You’re wanting an agreement. That’s more of a conclusion instead of an agreement.

Sophie  Dialogue refers to some product.

Zoe  What do you mean?

Sophie  Something tangible... It’s something that’s been made, not something that’s discussed.

Sophie, as can be seen from her contribution earlier in this discussion, has a perceptive understanding of the difference between dialogue and conversation. She articulates the fact that a dialogue is a product-oriented method of inquiry in which something is made. When Zoe suggests that I want agreement instead of a conclusion (effectively conflating the two), Sophie corrects her by saying that dialogue results in something tangible, which is ‘not something that's discussed.’

Emily, another significant contributor to the conversation, begins to draw together the important ideas of the conversation overall.

Emily  I think in an argument in that case then, two people would be sharing their opinions but not really taking on board what the other person’s saying.

Me  That is exactly right... Talk more about that Emily.

Emily  Like they’re very set in their belief on that topic, and so they wouldn’t listen, they’d just be trying to convince the whole time. [In discussion] they try and persuade, but not as forcefully.

Me  Yes, and they truly understand the other person’s point of view, and they try to get their head into the other person’s point of view...

-  [...]

Oliver  I see dialogue as a wider term, but especially the definition that Emily came up with I think would refer more to a discussion. As an exchange of ideas. And that’s the word that we use more. We don’t say that two people are dialoguing something.

Myself, Oliver and Emily at this point agree that a hermeneutic conversation involves listening, exchanging ideas, understanding points of view and persuasion without being forceful. Oliver makes the observation at the conversation’s close by reminding us that we are engaged in discussion rather than dialogue.
In the discussion below, taken from Transcript 17, I encourage students to see the possibility of having a discussion with a text that exhibits fusion of horizons, rather than another person in the discussion group. I begin by making explicit that the aim in conversation with a text is ‘to understand its point of view.’

Me  Ok. Now, we’re going to practice asking questions of this poem. First of all, in order to have a dialogue, or discussion, with this poem, we need to understand its point of view. What did we learn about modernism, which is what this poem is, it’s from the era called modernism, what did we learn about modernism that’s in this poem? What’s the poem trying to achieve?

Bella  To send his own message across.

Me  Yes, he’s trying to say something isn’t he. Send a message across. What do you mean by across. Across what?

Bella  To other people that he’s not really connected with. The public in general.

Me  Yes. That seems reasonable. Zoe?

Zoe  It’s puzzling and it involves interpretation.

Me  Oh right. So you’re onto modernism stuff now are you.

Zoe  I thought that’s what we were doing.

Me  Yes, ok. So we’ll assume that this poem is trying to send a message across... what did modernists try to do with their poetry? [...] 

Zoe  Well, it’s a puzzling poem so the quote that I have here from class is you have to do some work to work it out and it’s also symbolic and-

Me  -Ok, we’ll just stop and do one thing at a time. Now why would a modernist poet try to make things, what did you say?

Zoe  Puzzling.

Me  Puzzling. Why would they try and make things puzzling? What would be the point of that?

At this point I am deliberately engaging students in a discussion of some of the theoretical stances that modernist artists subscribed to. By doing so I am encouraging the students to better understand the art and artists of the modern era from an informed and knowledgeable perspective. In this I am merging the horizons of the contemporary students and the temporally different artists. There is some further discussion of this point, but while some students agree that the poetry is intentionally puzzling, Ava thinks something different. She eventually gathers some support for her thinking from Bella who combines her thinking with Ava in order to further develop their understanding of modernist intentions.
Me   Ava, what were you going to say?

Ava  I think that they’re not aiming to make something puzzling, they’re just creating this little window into themselves and they’re just writing about what they feel... you may understand that or you may not understand it. It’s not about being puzzling, it’s about whether you felt the same way.

Me   Let’s talk about this creating stuff from what you feel because that was the next modernist idea wasn’t it. It was supposed to be quite personal, a personal response to things... why would they think that’s important?

Ava  But are they trying to do anything? Aren’t they just writing?

Me   I’ll answer this quickly. There were some common features to modernism. Wouldn’t like to call them rules but guiding principles perhaps. One of which was, if you look here [at the handbook] individualism. Personal expression of ideas. Now why would they think that that’s important?

Bella Because art is always going to need a change. It’s always going to develop and change over time. So by having something new, it intrigues the audience more.

Me   Connect it to what Ava said about personal expression.

[...]

Bella Some people might want to keep things inside them but poetry a way of expressing yourself and opening out to others to get across that message, as I was saying before.

My direction to Bella is to ‘connect’ or fuse with Ava their two similar ideas. A little further into the discussion Amelia makes a tangential point about rules and guidelines and takes the discussion in quite another direction.

Amelia Well you said something about guidelines before, and like these guys are saying, it’s about emotion, and if artists had guidelines before they did a piece then they wouldn’t be an artist they just be trying guidelines. I don’t know.

Sienna I thought the whole thing about modern poetry was that there aren’t guidelines anymore and people can do what they like to.

-   [general chatter]

Me   Let’s think about what Sienna said. Is it true that modernists thought there shouldn’t be any rules at all?

Picking up on Sienna’s and Amelia’s idea, I then encourage the group to further discuss their contributions. The resultant discussion is a thoroughgoing and horizon-expanding discussion of rules in society.
Zoe    What I'm trying to get at is that in society there has always, and there still are, unwritten guidelines like... you can't just run out and be nude and stuff. It's not accepted in society. And with these styles of poems, I think that, when it first came about, because they seem similar, they have similar aspects with one another, that there were unwritten guidelines with this era. I don't necessarily think that they came afterwards. Because they seem kind of the same, unless they were all influenced from each other.

Me     Charlie, something about guidelines?

Charlie I don't know if we can say that modernism is this crazy new thing and that it means there are no guidelines. I might be wrong, but from what I understand modernism was the escape. It was the act of escaping. It wasn't the world you live in now when you've escaped from the guidelines, not that we have, it was doing it. It was getting into a new place. So saying that there were no rules and guidelines is not necessarily true, it was more of just a way of looking further at the guidelines.

Me     Superb. When we look at this image at the front [of the booklet]... There are rules involved in the creation of that image. You've got to admit that surely. Don't you?

Bella  What do you mean by rules, when you say that?

Here Bella is delving further into the idea of ‘rules’ with a worthwhile question of her own. What exactly a rule is has not yet been discussed, but it is something the students then proceed to do. The exchanges here are conversational in the sense that the students are examining the role of rules in the construction of modernist art, and then their role in defining eras. The students’ understanding of ‘rules’ expands as they further explore the modern era and its ambivalent commitment to rules. Note as well the changeable focus of the discussion as it moves from topic to topic. This shifting of focus is not something that is encouraged in the dialogical method of philosophical inquiry, but this is as well clearly an example of the conceptual development that P4C sees as philosophy proper.

In Transcript 22 below I work with the students in exploring modernism’s anxiety about technology and loss of meaning. It is an idea we had discussed briefly before. Again I demand of the students that they recognise the voice of tradition and the ‘other’ (the text’s author) as they work towards an interpretation of the poem.

Me     Now let's remember the history of this poem. It was during the time of modernism. What do we know about modernism? We know that it was a time of technological innovation and science. How does that give some kind of background or meaning to the poem? What's it actually talking about do you think?
Emily When science and technology and stuff started getting really big, they started trying to prove religion wrong. It could be that.

Me ...So essentially what do you think this poem is talking about?

Zoe Humanity’s loss of faith due to science trying to prove against it.

Me That’s one of the readings you could give this poem. It’s generally about a loss of faith. Does that make sense? That’s why it’s important that I pointed out the ‘he is dead’ thing...

[Further discussion of this idea]

Emily It’s like he didn’t want to know. It ruined his life.

Bella Denial.

Emily Yes, he’d rather be in denial. Not know all that stuff and believe in religion. But now that he’s learned it [science] he can’t just ignore it.

Me Yes. The tone of the poem is a bit regretful isn’t it...

Emily Yes.

Me Is it true then. Are we actually better off living in ignorance?

Emily No

Zoe It depends what type of person you are and what you are ignorant to.

Me Keep going.

Zoe Well, say if you’re a very religious person, set in your ways, you might be happy living in ignorance of science. Because now that, you have religion and science, religious people hear all this stuff about science, and there are lots of debates and stuff. Maybe they’d like to be ignorant of another religion, maybe we wouldn’t have had all of those crusades. Depends on the person and their views. And what they’re ignorant of. Each to his own.

Bella Maybe it’s like saying God’s done here, he’s created the Earth, he’s pretty much done everything he’s needed for.

Zoe Like move on, go create another world or something.

Bella And then he goes ok, pack up the moon, dismantle the sun. He’s had enough, leaves, goes somewhere else.

At this point the conversation finishes and the students move onto some writing work. They have, at this stage, through their conversation with the poetry of modernism, discussed philosophically disparate topics such as religion, science, belief, art and society. Each of these questions has been inspired by the fusion of horizons with modernism, both its art and theory. The questions were examined within the space of a hermeneutic conversation and the students’ thinking was expressed in thoughtful and articulate language.
Discussion

I have placed this collection of transcripts early on in my data analysis due to the importance of making clear Gadamer’s beliefs about the dual purpose of conversation and fusion of horizons in the development of understanding. Gadamer writes that

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text... Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity. 268

For Gadamer, understanding of a text happens neither if one attempts to recreate, nor accurately represent, the intentions of an original author. This is what Dilthey saw as the psychological aspect of interpretation and one of the traditional motivations of hermeneutics. Equally importantly, though, understanding does not occur if the interpreter ‘stubbornly’ projects her own meaning on a text without attending to the possibilities of a text’s intentions. ‘Attending to possibilities’ here clearly does not mean to recreate original intentions such that the interpreter’s own horizon is suspended or eradicated. In order that the interpreter be sensitive to ‘alterity’ she must already be conscious of a ‘self’ so that an other can be recognised as such. Understanding, therefore, must take place in a space where the horizon of both the author and the interpreter are brought to bear in conversation.

For Gadamer the fusion of horizons, the necessary shift for understanding, does not take place in isolation. Gadamer appropriated the concept of horizon chiefly from Husserl, and writes that

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth... 269

This explanation of the term suggests that for a living person in the world, her horizon is the sum of all the experiences and knowledge she has constructed in life and brings to bear in interpreting the world around her. The horizon then is that collation of experience drawn on in understanding that is central the work of interpretation. Gadamer also talks of ‘narrowness’ and the ‘possible expansion’ of horizon. In the former, one’s potential for interpretation is tempered by the limited nature of experiences and schemas of understanding. There remains the possibility of horizonal expansion however if the ‘right’ experiences take place within a properly developed conversational situation. It is this situation that I presented in the above...
transcript. Without being reductive, we can say that a primary purpose of hermeneutic thinking is the expansion of horizons. The value of this I will discuss further in the ‘Understanding’ section below. The image, then, of a philosopher in silent meditation on mountaintop, or in a cave, is not one that Gadamer subscribes to. For him, horizon development can only take place when a person enters into an authentically conversational relationship with an other, be that an other person or an other text. In terms of text, Gadamer found particular value in temporally distant eras and the ‘tradition’, an idea I will discuss and critique in further sections. For now though we can take any kind of ‘other’ as sufficient.

Here I draw what I believe is a clear distinction between the quality of dialogue as found in the Lipman P4C materials and conversation as suggested by Gadamer. For Lipman, dialogue is based on his interpretation of a Socratic figure as one who skillfully guides a group towards a concept-defining conclusion through the use of strategic questioning and deliberate maneuvers. For Gadamer’s hermeneutic conversations however,

Dialectic, so understood, is not a philosophical method, but rather a skill in conversation; it is, therefore, not a technique (techne) in the usual sense. There are no masters of conversation from their own power.  

So in hermeneutics we move from the well-known Socratic method (techne above) to a conversational orientation in which ‘there are no masters’. I have shown that Gadamer also based his ideal of hermeneutic conversation on Socrates’ model, but his interpretation was quite different to Lipman’s. In the above discussion I ask students to discuss the quality of their interactions over the preceding weeks. It is clear, first of all, that they have much to say on this topic that is interesting and thoughtful. It is also apparent that the interactions they are describing are different to those that might be considered typical in a classroom (teacher centered or simple question and answer), or classically Socratic. The first ideas that are suggested are that they concern ‘interpretation’ and are oriented towards classic texts (Of Mice and Men and modernist poetry). This readily, although simplistically at this stage, fulfills some of Gadamer’s criteria.

My role in this discussion needs some analysis as well. I am asking students to discuss a particular topic. But my questions are open-ended and work with the language that students bring to the discussion. Therefore it is Lily who suggests the terms arguing and debating, after which the other students and I pick up on her cues. My questions ask her to further examine her contributions. We continue for some time to sort out the differences between arguing and debating before I suggest that we combine the two together. It is Emily, and then finally

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Sophie, who completes the thought, who work through the two terms, and who come up with the difference between dialogue and discussion. My only substantive contribution throughout this discussion is ‘I don’t want you [the students] to think of dialogue as two people talking about the weather.’

Following this, Ava makes a positive observation about what the class is, at that very moment, doing. In the hermeneutic mode of discussion there is not the interrogative questioning that takes place in a dialogical inquiry, and nor is there the imperative to win an argument or be proven right. Figal writes that

One is prepared for a conversation only when one is prepared to listen, that is, when one is prepared to let the other say something. And one shows that one is capable of a conversation by talking in a way that corresponds to the preparedness for conversation of the other and not by using it as an opportunity to carry on a monologue.\(^{271}\)

Ava is making the observation that what the group is doing is ‘perfect’ for the reasons that ‘we’re exchanging thoughts and opinions but we’re doing it very politely.’ In the transcripts above it is clear that she is correct. There is a genuine ‘preparedness to listen’ evidenced by the students attending to each other’s contributions and building on each other’s ideas. The language that Lily originally introduced became the subject of further discussion for several minutes. But of equal importance for the discussion is the absence of monologue. I explicitly refer to the significance of this above when I say ‘Yes, and there’s a lot of listening, and there’s none of this I think, I think, I think, I think, where people aren’t connecting their ideas to other people’s ideas’. It is, perhaps, the most difficult of all qualities to teach students—that of ‘let[ing] the other say something’ and having students respond in kind. It will frequently mean that some students, with the moment passed, are not be able to say what they had in mind. But it will mean as well that all students will be listened and responded to when they speak.

These excerpts also work to illuminate the difference in intention between ‘discussion’ and ‘dialogue’. I have already compared in pedagogical term Lipman’s and Gadamer’s interpretation of Socrates’ role in philosophical discussion. Aligned with these opposed roles is the outcome or intentions of the community’s exchange. At the centre of P4C lies the belief that dialogue has a ‘telos’, or intentionational completion, which is the correct definition of a concept. This aligns with a traditional interpretation of Socrates who is takes his interlocutors in a particular direction that has, at its completion, the true definition of a concept. As such, the epistemological basis of the Lipman method, which is based so strongly on Deweyan scientific principles, is revealed. Rorty, the critical admirer of Dewey and selective appropriator

\(^{271}\) Ibid., 107.
of Gadamer, recognises this and illuminates the distinction between *dialogue* founded on epistemology and *conversation* in the hermeneutic mode:

For epistemology, conversation is implicit inquiry. For hermeneutics, inquiry is routine conversation. Epistemology views the participants as united in what Oakeshott calls an *universitas*—a group united by mutual interests in achieving a common end. Hermeneutics views them as united in what he calls a *societas*—persons whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by a common ground.  

This is effectively the same conclusion the students above came to after some months of carefully mediated hermeneutic practice. Oliver first of all recognizes that dialogue is ‘a wider term’ and that what is taking place ‘would refer more to a discussion’. Here is the first significant distinction—that dialogue and discussion are different modes of interaction. He then goes on to say that discussion is ‘an exchange of ideas’. This is not what Lipman (in positively recommending dialogue) or Rorty (in criticising dialogue in the quote above) would describe as ‘achieving a common end’, as such an exchange does not have as its motivation a shared conclusion. Sophie further develops this idea when she adds that ‘*Dialogue refers to some product... Something tangible...*’ Again this ‘product’ is, in Rorty’s terms, a ‘common end’—the telos of dialogue. For Sophie this common end is ‘*something that’s been made, not something that’s discussed.*’ She recognises that discussion has another intention besides a product as such. In the discussions above, and as the students have recognised, their intention is to expand horizons through civil engagement, not, as Emily points out, ‘*just be trying to convince the whole time*’ until common ground is found.

There is another related type of horizon fusing in the second section of the transcripts above—that which can be found when a subject engages in hermeneutic discussion with a text rather than a person. My claim, following Gadamer, is that it is possible to have a discussion with a text that results in understanding, just as it is possible to do the same with another person. Figal acknowledges this when he writes that ‘[i]f the interpretation of a text is to be successful, it must be determined through the same openness that characterizes a successful conversation between persons.’ He recognises that a preparedness to understand the text as ‘other’ is not a matter of merely maintaining and projecting prior prejudices onto texts but to recognise, suspend, but also critique these prejudices. At this point I must make it clear that absolute recognition is nothing more than an ideal to aim for. We cannot hope to account for every horizon position we hold in conscious life. We must also remember wholly suspended
beliefs would make interpretation impossible, as interpretation is not possible without prejudice.

The first observation I make about the second set of transcripts is that in encouraging this kind of hermeneutic relationship with a text described above, my role as the teacher becomes somewhat different. Here I act rather as an advocate of the text in addition to, and as well as, a moderator of the discussion amongst the students and the text. This is necessary for the reason that students are not necessarily attuned to the nuances and purposes that a text may have been written for, nor may they be aware of the historical and cultural situations in which the text have been written. This advocacy reveals itself at several points throughout the conversations, most explicitly when I say, at the beginning of the transcripts, ‘we need to understand its point of view... what did we learn about modernism that’s in this poem?’ In this initial question I ensure that students remember its historicity and that it was formed in a particular time and place. In further exchanges I say that ‘There were some common features to modernism... guiding principles perhaps’ and ‘We know that it [the modernist era] was a time of technological innovation and science.’ In each of these acts of text-advocacy I am not demanding that students interpret the poems in particular ways, but that they are attentive to the voices of the text that speak to them from another place.

This advocacy needs to tempered in a deliberate way so that, in discussion with the text, an obeisance to the text does not occur such that the discussion becomes merely a matter of attempting to recreate the historical intentions of the author and the time in which it was written. To say that ‘In the modernist era artists were concerned with technological innovation and science’ may be the case, but not truth as hermeneutics might see it. This is why Bernasconi warns that

To withdraw from the attempt to attain agreement... is to exclude the possibility of one's own standpoint being challenged. The corresponding hermeneutical danger arises therefore when, in an attempt to understand a text historically, one excludes the possibility of discovering in that text a valid and intelligible truth.\(^{274}\)

The text can challenge the reader by having its own truth claims heard. This is why my advocacy of the text is so important in these hermeneutic discussions. The recognition of these claims is where understanding begins. But to merely see a text as a product of its time, and seek out manifestations of this historicity, is not to take seriously any broader existential claims it may be making. In the quote above Bernasconi is suggesting that to ‘understand a

text historically’, that is, to see it as the product of historical forces, is not to understand it at all, but rather to know about it as a product of its time and nothing more. Gadamer makes the same criticism of the psychological approach to interpretation, where a text is recognised as various products of an author’s life and experience. This joining of the dots between text and time and author neglects that which is most important in the hermeneutic approach, which is the searching for ‘a valid and intelligible truth.’ For Gadamer this truth must be useful and applicable to human experience.

This is why, in the transcripts, I do not leave the discussion at the point where we have demonstrated that the poems (in this case) reflect modernist tendencies. To do so would be to leave the students’ prejudices ‘unchallenged’ and the potential truth of the text unrevealed. Instead I demand more of the students with questions like ‘What’s it [the poem] actually talking about do you think?’ and ‘Why would they [the poets] try and make things puzzling?’ The point here is not that modernist poetry is puzzling, or that there was this thing called technology that had to be grappled with, but that in engaging with these ideas students are forced to reflect on their own prejudices and wonder, privately to themselves and publically to those in the group, whether or not there is something to be learned from this engagement that might necessitate a horizon expanding shift in prejudice. A mere historical understanding (which I identify with a mere knowledge of the poem) does not demand this shift. Gadamer reminds us, in further demonstrating the similarity of conversation between text and subject with conversation between subjects, that ‘[j]ust as each interlocutor is trying to reach agreement on some subject with his partner, so also the interpreter is trying to understand what the text is saying.’

The students exemplify this understanding through their grappling with the texts as they work beyond the literal and historical to the philosophical and useful. Zoe points in this direction when she says that the poem may be discussing ‘Humanity’s loss of faith due to science trying to prove against it’ and Emily followed this up soon after with ‘Yes, he’d rather be in denial. Not know all that stuff and believe in religion. But now that he’s learned it [science] he can’t just ignore it.’ Bella then finishes the thought by adding ‘Maybe it’s like saying God’s done here, he’s created the Earth, he’s pretty much done everything he’s needed for.’ In recognising that the texts might be discussing these ideas the students are, with my assistance, recognising the voice of the text through careful attentiveness to its situation as well as their own.

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275 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 270.
Authority

This excerpt, taken from Transcript 4, is also designed by me to problematise a specific element of discussion—that of the existence of power and (more specifically for hermeneutics) authority in the classroom. Following on from the above, where we established that the primary task of discussion is to negotiate a shared language, I encourage students to examine some further conditions for consensus about this language in a discussion group. My thinking here is guided as much by Habermas’ theorising on power, and his ideal speech situation, as by Gadamer’s ‘rehabilitation’ of authority, both of which I will discuss in further detail below. I begin the discussion by suggesting an action I might take to skew matters in a way that favours my beliefs.

Me   Let’s say I had made some kind of threat against Charlie.
Zoe  What did you do?
Me   I’m not telling. But it was pretty mean.
Zoe  [Joking] Well then, you should sort it out. Charlie, are you ok?
Me   All of a sudden, we don’t have a consensus anymore. [...] Why has that come about?
Zoe  Because he’s not afraid to speak his mind.
Charlie No, I am afraid to speak my mind.
Zoe  Oh yes.
Bella He’s been manipulated.
Me   Ok, there’s some manipulation going on. What else might potentially be going on?
Zoe  Um. He’s insecure as a person.
Me   Excellent, I’ve made him insecure in some way.
Sienna Maybe you want to see it as black.
Charlie No, because I think it’s orange but I’m saying black because I don’t want to get detentions.
-   [...]  
Zoe  We should make it known that Jason has manipulated Charlie and he’s a bad teacher.
-   [general chatter about this - untranscribable]
Bella I probably wouldn’t listen to you, because I wouldn’t take you seriously.

Zoe and Bella together draw some conclusions about the effect a misuse of power has in a class discussion. Zoe immediately concludes that such an abuse of power makes me a ‘bad’ teacher and Bella decides that she ‘wouldn’t listen to you’ [meaning me as the teacher] as she
would similarly see my role in the discussion, were I to do that, as poor teaching. After further discussion of the same idea, I ask the class to summarise the conditions required for genuine discussion.

Me  Now I want us to think about how is it that we can make sure that we are really achieving consensus. What needs to be in place? What kind of conditions need to be in place for us to achieve consensus?
Zoe  We respect one another.
Sophie  There can’t be, if there are consequences for what you’re saying, then you’re obviously not going to be saying what you really think.
Me  [Inaudible] consequences you mean?
Sophie  Or even good consequences that then encourage you to-
Me  -That’s really important isn’t it?
Charlie  I’ll give you a something or other if you don’t disagree.
Me  Yes, I’ll give you a lollypop... Ok so, that’s another thing... There can’t be consequences, good or bad.
Sienna  Bias?
Me  Tell me about bias.
Sienna  Like if you really wanted it to be a black pencil case because that was your favourite colour, and so you said yeah. You know.
Me  Ok. So we can’t be biased, that’s a good one. What else. What about me?
Zoe  Yeah, what about you?
Me  What are some of the bad things perhaps that I can do, or the good things perhaps that I can do?

Here I am asking the students to further examine my role as the authority figure in the discussion. Prior to this I made explicit the power I had to manipulate the discussion through the use of inducements (detentions, lollipops etc.).

Zoe  You can manipulate us into saying what you believe is the correct thing.
Me  How can I manipulate you do you think?
Zoe  Well, you could threaten us.
Charlie  You have more influence than everyone else because you have more power than us.
Zoe  That’s what we’re trying to get to aren’t we? We’re trying to get that there shouldn’t be a power in the circle of love or ninja circle. There
should not be one single power. We should all be equal and love one another.

Me  Zoe is basically right. So, we’ll talk about me again briefly, then about you guys. What should I be doing?

I believe the point has been made about a possible misuse of my power. I am now asking students to think more of the beneficial things I might be able to do.

Zoe  Putting in your own two cents.
Charlie  No, because he’s influencing us.
Zoe  Well, we’re all influencing one another. That’s the thing.

Again Sienna’s sharp wit has made a good point in an incisive and humorous way. She is suggesting that I need to be removed from my position of power in order to be genuinely fair. Charlie, who clearly understands this, takes up her point.

Charlie  He’s no longer a teacher, therefore he’s one of us.
Zoe  No, we could use a thing called trust.
Charlie  [Joking] No, because trust doesn’t exist in the ninja circle.

Here Charlie is affirming the point he made earlier—that I cannot really be trusted unless I ‘waiver’ [or waive] my rights as a teacher.
Zoe  But that’s the thing, he’s a pretty fair teacher
Sienna  He still tells us what to do, he gives us lessons and stuff.
Charlie  We could have an impartial mediator who waivers his rights, therefore, we have a witness.
Sienna  Why do we need Jason in the circle anyway?
Lily  Jason’s more like a guiding sort of a person.
Zoe  If he’s a guiding person, that’s what we’re trying to avoid. Having one person overruling.
-  [everyone talking at once]
Lily  [In charge of the court, but they don’t have their opinion. The other people decide on the thing, not the judge person.]
-  [everyone talking at once]
Me  Ok. That was a very nice point. Unfortunately we’re running out of time a bit, but what I do want you to, and you don’t have to decide now, is to start working out what you think my role would be in this.
Sienna  In what?
Me  Because I heard someone-
Sienna  -In what?
Me  In having conversations. Where there's consensus.
Zoe  Do we need it to be equal? Rules? You have put this in. That’s the thing. You’ve overpowered us saying that this needs to be equal.
-  [everyone talking at once]
Zoe  Have you noticed? We didn’t think about kicking Jason out before he said ok I’m going to say this to Charlie. You know, once we started thinking about that then we were thinking hey we don’t need Jason, he can just be a mediator.

Zoe has recognised that it was me that generated the discussion around my role as an authority figure in the discussion through my ‘threat’ to Charlie that I’d give him a detention if he didn’t agree with me. In this she is correct, but I am unsure as to what she means by the difference between not needing me and needing me as a ‘mediator’. The students express some confusion about this as well. What she has recognised though is that I have used my power to say that ‘this needs to be equal.’

Sienna  Where did that come from?
Charlie  [laughing] No one understands.
Me  Ok. This is what I want you to do now. [...] Just write down what you think might be a few good rules to have a good honest open conversation where there’s consensus.

Sienna  Do these rules have to be realistic? Like can you say, no one disrespects, and then no one disrespects.

Me  They can be a bit idealistic for now, how about that? [...] Remember the rules are about how we can come to agreement and reach consensus about things.

Here I am again thinking of Habermas’ ‘ideality’ in the ideal speech situation.

Zoe  Do we need to come to agreement and reach consensus if this is a philosophy circle.

Me  To agree that that’s orange we do but that’s another discussion we’ll have.

Zoe  No, but that’s the thing. If you want everybody to agree then that’s kind of manipulating people into—like you know they don’t get—it’s like saying hey you guys have to agree on that or you don’t get your [inaudible].

Zoe, at the conversation’s end, is still (quite rightly) concerned that I have mandated ‘agreement’ by recourse to my authority and that I have in fact manipulated this. She concludes that ‘If you want everybody to agree then that’s kind of manipulating‘ which is a potentially powerful point. My reply is that we must agree on linguistic terms alone, but the conversation finishes (due to time constraints) before the idea can be properly explored.

Discussion

Habermas, the critical theorist who both admired and criticised Gadamer, saw in hermeneutics an obeisance to authority, or at the very least an insufficient skepticism of the role authority can play in distorting truth as a means of achieving its own ideological ends. Habermas writes:

The standing agreement... could legitimately be equated with a real accord on the matter in question only if we were able to say for certain that every consensus worked out in the medium of linguistic tradition is arrived at unconstrainedly and without distortion. We know from depth-hermeneutics, however, that the dogmatism of the traditional context is the vehicle not only for the objectivity of language in general, but for the repressiveness of a power relationship which deforms the intersubjectivity of understanding as such and systematically distorts colloquial communication. For that reason, every consensus in which interpretation terminates stands under the suspicion of having been pseudocommunicatively compelled...

Habermas’ observation is an important one. It was a criticism of Gadamer that I took seriously in my own work, and explains my intentions in the discussion above. For Habermas, genuine linguistic accord can only take place when the conditions in which that accord is achieved are free from the distorting influences of ideology and power. In Gadamer’s work, and in Habermas’ quote above, the ideas of ‘authority’ and ‘tradition’ are frequently intertwined or conflated, with one (tradition) frequently being the vessel of the other (authority). In the intention and analysis of the discussion above, I am particularly examining the idea of power that resides not so much in tradition (something I will examine in further analyses), but in authority figures—in this case the classroom teacher. For Habermas, the classroom teacher (holding the power that she does) is in a position to use this power as a means with which to control discussion in such a way that they meet her own ideological ends, rather than result in genuine understanding.

It is absolutely clear that the classroom teacher holds this power over her students and it is this relationship I wanted to explicitly problematise, if not resolve, in the discussion above. I begin the discussion then by asking the students to imagine a situation in which I threaten one of them with a detention, an action that disrupts the potential for genuine agreement. They immediately see that such an intervention on my part means ‘he’s been manipulated.’ I then further provoke the situation by asking the class to imagine an action on my part that rewards agreement (a lollypop), which the students see as equally distorting. It is not a difficult idea to grasp but I want to deliberately draw it to the surface of students’ thinking so that, eventually, they will become monitors of their own discursive conditions. In this I am drawing on Habermas’ ideal speech situation, which mandates the conditions under which distortion-free discussion can take place. Among these conditions is one that necessarily excludes force from the motive of any agreement. Through using force (the threat of detentions or promise of lollipops) I am making explicit to the students one of the conditions of genuine agreement. After some discussion, which rests on the recognition that my position of power could in fact result in manipulations or distortions of the linguistic environment, Sienna suggest that the class ‘fires him [me].’ In this suggestion lies the understanding that it is only by removing me from my position of power that the problem of distortion can be eliminated.

Gadamer, however, has a direct response to Habermas’ criticism that authority is an always-problematic factor in communicative exchanges. In Habermas, Gadamer sees exactly the Enlightenment suspicion of authority, tradition and prejudice that he criticises so comprehensively in his own work. In previous sections I have discussed that fact that a chief goal of Gadamer’s was to rehabilitate prejudice and authority, as they are necessary
precursors to understanding. This requires considerable qualification however, as Gadamer does below is his response to Habermas’ critique:

As I see it, then, there are compelling reasons for viewing acknowledgment as the determining factor in true authority relationships. The question is simply: on what does this acknowledgement rest? In many cases, to be sure, such acknowledgement is really nothing much more than a yielding of the powerless to force, but that is not true obedience and does not rest on authority. One need only study representative instances of the loss or decline of authority to see what authority is and whence it derives its life. Not from dogmatic force, but from dogmatic acknowledgment. What, however, is dogmatic acknowledgment, if not this: that one concedes to authority a superiority in knowledge and judgment and on that ground believes that it is just.277

In this quote we can the distinction between Habermas’ and Gadamer’s beliefs about authority. For Habermas, the rational person rejects authority as being a distorting influence on truth. For Gadamer, the rational agent chooses an authoritative voice to assist her in understanding, as that choice is made on the basis that certain others have ‘a superiority’ in the knowledge and skills required to develop this understanding. There is little doubt however that this choice is potentially problematic, and it is this choice that I wanted students to further examine in this discussion.

If we read through the conversation further we can see that the students, with some provocation from myself, are working their way through this exact problem—what is the role of power in their conversations and what should be the proper role of the teacher? Zoe draws my deliberate contribution in this regard to the attention of the class by observing that, ‘Have you noticed? We didn’t think about kicking Jason out before he said ok I’m going to say this to Charlie.’ After this, a range of suggestions are made as to what I should do, including making me an equal, giving me a role like a judge in a court, seeing me as a guide, or having me waive my rights as a teacher (or even questioning the need for me to be there!). Each of these ideas represents the realisation that authority, if used incorrectly, can be a factor that impacts negatively on agreement. Remember however that for Gadamer the concession to authority is a rational act. Any teacher that has tried to assert authority, rather than earn it, will recognise ‘whence it derives its life’. For Dobrosavljev,

That is the basis for the authority of teachers and experts and owing to their better acquaintance with certain fields we trust them. Yet, that belief is not blind, it is grounded on certain reasons that showed their competence in the field.278

In the discussion above there are several instances where the students have made some clear choices about my authoritative presence based on sound reasoning. For instance Bella states that, ‘I probably wouldn’t listen to you, because I wouldn’t take you seriously,’ if it was demonstrated that I had manipulated a student. For Zoe I’d be a ‘bad teacher’ for doing the same thing. Later Zoe says ‘that’s not really fair, if Jason’s not allowed in the circle,’ thus affirming my rights to be a contributor after which Sienna acknowledges that, ‘he’s trying to get us to think.’ And finally Zoe states that ‘that’s the thing, he’s a pretty fair teacher.’ In each of these final contributions it is fair to surmise that, to some extent, these students are making fair and rational judgments about my authority and the role I should play in the community.

Effective-Historical Consciousness

In this substantial section of analysis I discuss a range of hermeneutic concepts that can be placed under the general heading effective-historical consciousness. Gallagher recognises the necessary relationships between these hermeneutic concepts by suggesting that

> Interpretation is based, to some extent, on individual experience, but such experience is embedded in traditions which find their way into interpretation in the form of authoritative prejudices.\(^{279}\)

While they might deserve a section of their own, so intertwined are these ideas that to discuss them individually would create more problems of organisation and coherence than might be solved. The concepts prejudice, tradition and effective history each supervene on the other with an indeterminateness and circularity that is an ontological necessity in any hermeneutic event. That is to say, for example, one cannot obtain the prejudice required to understand without the necessary exposure to tradition but, without prejudice, any attempt at interpreting tradition remains empty of meaning. The awareness of this situation is awareness of effective-history, but the reflective process that draws this to consciousness is always incomplete. Because of the nature of these ideas the excerpts below tend to be brief parts of larger conversations in which ideas are discussed quickly before the conversation progresses.

In this first excerpt, taken from Transcript 8, I move students towards a preliminary discussion of the broad hermeneutic concept of effective history, in which the fact that we are prejudiced beings, influenced and created by historical events, is recognised. This is not to say that we are constructed or bound by these influences, but that we are enabled to creatively shape and project understanding through our acknowledgement and interpretation of the past. The idea perhaps is not particularly difficult for students of this age, but I am deliberately

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laying the groundwork for an explicit discussion of such, and so emphasising the conscious element of effective history. This first exploration is brief and the students only touch on the fact of their own historicity. The discussion is motivated by a challenge I set the students, which was to pick out a section from the text we were examining (Of Mice and Men) that particularly resonated with them, in this case an example of racism.

Amelia: I think it’s more that he’s already kind of accepted Lennie and Candy into his home, space, which he doesn’t, isn’t really, it isn’t really their place to do that. But for him, and he’s already accepted them because he sort of likes them. But when she starts to mock Lennie, and he doesn’t like her anyway, then he thinks this is enough. I’ve already accepted two people into my space but to have someone who’s being disrespectful is too much.

Me: Yes. And the risk he took wasn’t worth it in the end... Today, it’s pretty obvious what we think of this type of behaviour towards this person. Sum it up for us.

Oliver: Bigotted

Me: Bigotted, racist, do we have other words for it?

Jack: Rather impolite

- [more discussion about this]

Following these introductory observations I attempt to draw the students to a more explicit discussion of effective history by asking students to reflect on time as it acts on us as people.

Me: So what’s happened that we can look at this and say well, she’s acting racist. How is it that it’s come about that we can say that?

Bella: The words and the tone she’s using. The power she’s using.

Me: I mean what’s happened to us, as people.

Jack: A couple hundred years of slavery?

Jack’s contribution is blunt but appropriate—our knowledge of slavery is an historical fact (so to speak) that has acted upon us. This fact may have been passed down to us through books (such as the book the students are currently reading), movies, conversations etc.

Bella: We’ve accepted that it doesn’t matter what colour you are, everyone’s going to be equal at some point. Well that’s the way it should be.

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280 For a précis of this text see Appendix 4
Oliver Not really.

Bella Well that's the way it should be.

Oliver That's not really what's happened.

- [more discussion about this]

Bella You can say it's developed over that time though.

Me So, time is important isn't it. How else has it come about that we can look at this and think well, that's racist, bigoted, things like that.

Emily Ideas have changed.

- [general chatter about this]

Amelia Not much has really changed, it's just that it's seen as being bad. A lot of people will agree that slavery and racism is horrible but really there's so much of it still there, been though they say it's horrible. But what about the refugees? We've got such a racist government, and slavery is everywhere. Everything is made from slavery.

Bella and Emily together begin to discuss the impact of time on their beliefs, but little is made of this observation as Amelia then begins to discuss her own ideas about whether or not things have really ‘changed’. In the next excerpt, also taken from Transcript 8, I again try to engage students in a discussion of historicity, where they discuss shifts in a filmed interpretation of Of Mice and Men that demonstrate an effect of changing beliefs over time. In the movie some of the characters and events have been altered substantially from the novel—an interpretive gesture that Oliver below quickly recognises.

Me The question again is what role has time played in the [1992] film's interpretation of the [1937] book?

- [...] Oliver - Do you mean the different ideals clearly portrayed. The fact that they humanised his wife. They worked with him more [Crooks]. It seemed like they didn't despise him as much.

Me Now what role has time played in that?

Jack It made it less racist.

Oliver Sexist

Me ... Now I think we're on the right track. [...] Emily They're nicer to the minorities when it was back then, Crooks, Curly's wife, Lenny. They portray them nicer.

Me What's that got to do with time Emily.

Emily I think what's acceptable now.

Me Good, now I think we're moving somewhere. Sienna?
Sienna  In the film they’re trying to make it look like it wasn’t that bad back then because it would make them look bad. They’re not making them as racist in the film because it will make it look like [in a voice] ooh they were really bad back then, they were so racist back then, so horrible...

Zoe  If this film was made back then, I’m not sure whether the racism would be encouraged or discouraged. I think it would be maybe more acceptable then than now.

Me  Why do you think that Zoe?

Zoe  I don’t know, it just gets people to think about it. For black people back then, I reckon they would have felt hurt, and they would have really understood Crook’s situation...

Lily  Following on from what Zoe said about how we would perceive the racism, if we saw that all of the characters were being racist we might not feel as sorry for them. In the movie is you do feel sorry for the characters at the end. But if we were watching and [in a voice] ohh they’re really racist, then you might not connect as well with them, cause you’d go oh I don’t like them, they’re being mean to people and discriminating against them. So they would have had to change it a little bit so that we feel sorry and empathise with them better.

By working together, and through the work of previous conversations, the students are able to articulate with clarity the subtle effects that time has had on the filmmakers’ interpretation of the book. Oliver began by recognising the ‘different ideals clearly portrayed’ after which other students recognised the differences between beliefs ‘back then’ and ‘what’s acceptable now’.

Lily then concludes the conversation with an acute summary of the necessity of change so that we ‘empathise with them better’.

To further demonstrate the consciousness of history of effect, as well as introduce Gadamer’s idea of prejudice, I have selected several pieces of writing that have been developed by students in response to traditional texts including Pride and Prejudice\textsuperscript{281} and various modernist poems. In these pieces, which include works from both my year 10 English class (on modernist poetry) and my year 11 Literature class (on Pride and Prejudice), part of the task set by me had the students reflect on the role that their histories and consequent prejudices played in their interpretations. In each you will see that the students show an awareness of both—and so exhibit the quality of historical-effective consciousness. For example, Charlie writes of his own poem, written in response to his interpretation of Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, that,

...my poem is hinting at the fact that the notion that life goes on is a negative but inevitable one. Specifically, I hinted that some of the reasons that this is

\textsuperscript{281} For a précis of this text see Appendix 5
happening is due to the times we live in, and to go more specifically, the age of technology. Because we have advanced so much in the area of technology, it has become possible to talk, send instant messages, and just generally communicate without having the person or people that we are talking to. I think that this is a big part of the problem, because talking face to face is much more real and it forces you to become a part of someone else’s life, whereas otherwise you can ask about someone’s life but not register it. Therefore, I believe that being in the age that we are currently in has a big impact on the discussed notion.

Charlie, in discussing his interpretation of the poem, immediately shows the explicit manner in which he is able to bring his own horizon and sets of prejudices to bear on the original in a productive manner. Note first of all that it is a conversational projection, in that his interpretive work suggests sensitivity to the original. He is also able to articulate with considerable acuity the manner in which his own prejudice, that is so reflective of the age he lives in, is drawn on in both his interpretive as well as his creative work. He is conscious that he lives in the ‘age of technology’ which is ‘a big part of the problem’ and that ‘being in the age that we are currently in has a big impact on the discussed notion’. It is an example of effective-historical consciousness in action.

A further example can be found in Ruby’s blog entry following a conversation about the text Pride and Prejudice:

This belief came from the days where an almost misogynistic attitude was commonly expressed throughout society; from what I know these views date back to where pride and prejudice was set, and in the culture displayed in the book, along with many others, women were objectified. As we have discussed many times, growing up in the society that we have and being exposed to feminist views strongly because of our families and education, this definitely gives me a different interpretation of P&P than perhaps somebody who has been bought up in a different environment. Because of this my interpretation was definitely influenced and my attitudes towards some aspects of the novel were particularly strong. Although we may think that this behaviour is exclusive to the times of P&P, the objectifying of women is still a huge issue, especially in the media, although there is of course more leeway for women to stand as an individual.

Ruby, in her writing, highlights the fact that ‘we have discussed many times’ the effect that language, culture and history has on the development of prejudice and its resultant impact on understanding. This is evidence that her observations are not accidental, but are reflective of the hermeneutic themes and ideas addressed in our classroom conversations. If we take ‘feminist views’ as a one of the prejudices that ‘effects’ Ruby’s horizon and worldview, she is able to articulate the fact that her interpretation of, and resistance to, the traditional text
*Pride and Prejudice* is shaped by this effect. This is also clear evidence of the ability of the hermeneutically trained thinker to critically interpret texts, rather than (as Foucault once observed) merely annotate them. Ruby’s prejudicial language (*misogynistic attitude, objectifying of women*) is contemporary, but she is using it consciously in her developing understanding of the text. She also hints at the possible *application* of the text towards the end of her writing, a practice that will be discussed further below.

Bella, also reflecting on *Pride and Prejudice*, tries to grasp another aspect of effective-historical consciousness—that being her own finitude and place within the hermeneutic circle:

*The still existent social expectations of women have been evident for a very long time. Although women are aware of this they still abide by them. I believe they do so is all because the fact that they don’t know any better. Meaning we have had these social standards for so long it is hard for us to notice the influences that enclose us, which seems to be a bit ironic for me to state. But it is not just women that seem to be put up with rules it is everyone. In some ways it seems as if that we have got a bad habit that we can no longer control, so we can not have innocence nor purity from then on we are a voice of what is today. As young girls are born into this global community they are immediately exposed to the image of this ‘ideal woman’ of today’s media. So it is hard to pin point where this standard was created, because it seems to be everywhere. Our surrounding environment is the answer to why we are like we are, and we cannot help it because we don’t know what truly where we began to set these standards, humans are hypocritical.*

Bella’s first insight is that ‘it is hard for us to notice the influences that enclose us.’ Here Bella’s language reflects the conversations we have had as a group about the hermeneutic circle, where we discussed the difficulties faced when trying to do any type of grounding in looking for the origin of effect. She further suggests that one difficulty is discovering the cause of the ‘ideal woman,’ but notes that its effects can be found in the media, the locus of discourse and culture in her world. Finally she notes, not without some frustration, that ‘our surrounding environment is the answer to why we are like we are,’ a sentiment and claim that aligns with Gadamer’s on the hermeneutic circle and the history of effect.

In a further excerpt, taken from Transcript 26, the always-unfinished process of historical reflection is discussed. Here I engage the students in speculating about the possibility of recognising the effect of their own historical situation on their interpretive work. My first question addresses this explicitly.

*Me*  ...So in your response what is there about you that's in there, that's affected the way you've interpreted the poem.

[...]
Bella  It's not really a response to our history. You can't really play out your whole life and pick things out, well I guess you could. It's more-
Me        -why couldn't you?
Bella  In a poem like this you don't want to focus on yourself, you want to focus on the subject. The story itself.
Olivia  But how you've interpreted it is a consequence of your history.
Bella  I guess. I feel like this poem means to me everything, it needs to be more recognised, Icarus needs to be more recognised. It's written in that way that he is the focus.
Me        So how is that a reflection of yourself? You don't have to go deeply psychological here or anything.

Olivia has clearly grasped the idea of effective-history here by using the language of hermeneutics to explain it to Bella, who is inclined towards resisting the idea through her desire to ‘to focus on the subject’. I challenge Bella to work towards a greater historical-consciousness but without, importantly, being ‘deeply psychological’ as Gadamer so frequently warns against. Ava quickly recognises however the difficulties inherent in developing consciousness.

Ava   Are you asking where? When? What?
Me    Just like my example [I which I interpreted the Icarus painting], me being a teacher and working with people of your age.
Ava   It just makes me a bit unsure. We’re all just different people. You can’t always pinpoint it to one experience. It’s just how you’re born.
Me    And how you grow up.
Ava   Sometimes you can. You could think, you could do that easily.
Me    You’re absolutely right. So this question is flawed in a sense. Is that what you’re saying?
Ava   Yes.
Olivia  It’s like [the] nature versus nurture we may be getting in to.

Here, while Ava established the general difficulties in establishing a ‘ground’ of interpretation, Olivia finds an appropriate analogy by comparing the search for this ground to the well-known nature/nurture debate. By comparing the ongoing argument to be found in the psychological and scientific search for an answer to the ground of human personality and achievement, she shows understanding of the circular and groundless nature of interpretation and horizon.
In order to introduce the concept of tradition I have chosen to take perhaps an initially unusual example whereby it is myself as the teacher that is examined as a traditional text. In examining various definitions of tradition, and conflating these with contemporary definitions of ‘text’, I think I am safe ground in seeing myself, as a teacher, as one source of tradition, or indeed as a traditional text. The following discussion, taken from Transcript 17, sees the students play this idea out amongst themselves. This session begins by Sienna reading part of Appendix 1 to the class (a short text from Gadamer about dialogue and questions). What was meant to be a conversation about questioning however quickly turned to a worthwhile discussion about tradition and my role in it (or as it) as a teacher.

Zoe: I just want to add something in. We went through this last term and we decided that you wouldn’t dictate everything that is happening. And I think maybe we should try doing it without you.

Me: And that is exactly what this is about.

Zoe: Sorry. I felt really bad bringing it up.

Me: No no, that’s exactly what this is about. Cause what did I just say? I feel like I was doing too much of the question asking.

Zoe: So I think it takes everybody including you to stop that.

Amelia: I think you’re a valid part of the circle, and you know more about life, you probably do, you have more experience.

[interuption]

Amelia: You are just as much a part of the circle as everyone else. And I think it’s beneficial that you are because you have a better understanding of life because you have more experience.

Charlie: [inaudible] the teacher.

Sienna: I agree.

Amelia: Yes, exactly, you’re meant to be sharing your experiences with us... It’s good that we need to know everyone else’s opinions and need to learn what other people are saying, but you’re just as much a part of the circle. This is all about questioning, and learning more, so why is it going to make any difference if someone who has more experience sits out of it. You’re just adding to the opinion and knowledge of people in the circle.

At this point in their hermeneutic development it should be noted that the students are comfortable and insightful in discussing and critiquing my role in the conversations. Zoe initially suggests that ‘maybe we should try doing it [hermeneutic conversations] without you’. Although it might seem like an ideal form of student autonomy and resistance to authority in one way, it also would not be an appropriate hermeneutic move as the discussion might take
place without an appropriate source of tradition and authority that would form the ‘matter’ of discussion. Amelia quickly establishes that I may be useful as I have a ‘better understanding of life because you have more experience’. This is just what Gadamer sees as one of the necessities of critically engaging with tradition. The conversation continues with Bella building on this idea.

*Bella*  I agree to some extent that he’s worthy to the circle but I don’t necessarily say that he’s had more experiences in such a way. Because today teenagers are always taking action so you can’t really say, just because he’s a peer, he’s really experienced more than us. Because I think everyone’s at their own level.

*Zoe*  Maybe he has experienced different things to us.

-  [general chatter about this - untranscribable]

*Zoe*  Yes, they just have different experiences to us. And I’m sure if we could add up every experience... now I’m not implying that you’re old.

*Sienna*  In comparison to us.

*Zoe*  Yes, he’s old in comparison to us so therefore I don’t necessarily agree with saying this person has had more experiences than us therefore they are superior, I just agree that he has had more experiences than us because he’s older. They may not be the same experiences as we’ve had and we may not experience the experience that he has had but he has had more experience.

-  [general chatter about this - untranscribable]

*Me*  Ava was next, she’s got her hand up.

*Ava*  I think that by being in the circle Jason we’re not only learning from you but you also learn from us. And I think that’s the idea behind the circle isn’t it?

*Bella*  Because we all share our experiences

*Zoe*  And that’s the idea of your thesis.

*Ava*  And that’s the round table.

The students, while accepting my presence, still maintain a critical stance to this presence. They recognise that my experiences are ‘in such a way’ different to theirs, and that while I’ve had more (because I’m ‘old’!) they’re not necessarily ‘superior’. Finally, in my role as a source of tradition, and in recognition of the hermeneutic circle, Ava recognises that ‘we’re not only learning from you but you also learn from us.’ This elegantly encapsulates the key idea that tradition can be a source of useful knowledge. Tradition is not a fixed entity, but its content is informed by the prejudices and knowledge of those doing the interpretive work. Ava is correct
in saying that ‘the idea behind the circle’ is that the work of interpretation is conversational and that we are all in the process of learning. By discussing this as well as ‘the idea of your thesis’, (which I had always frequently reminded them of) Ava, as well as other students, are demonstrating their understanding of the hermeneutic philosophy underpinning the conversational work. In this we can see similar ideas to that in the conversation about authority above, and Gadamer as well frequently conjoins the two when discussing them in his work.

More conventionally, however, the source of tradition is found in classic texts, and in my conversations with students we are always using such texts as the ‘object’ on which to focus our discussions. This focus, though, is never about the classic text itself and alone, but about what light it can throw on the matters it brings to our attention. It is this element that distinguishes in particular a hermeneutic approach to P4C from a Lipman approach. In this first example, taken from Transcript 26, students discuss their interpretations of Carlos’ poem Landscape With The Fall of Icarus. The students initially remain within the poem (so to speak) and talk about the practical advice that might be gained from reading it.

Emily  It reminds me that everyone makes mistakes. Even the father. Most problems don’t come from just one person. They’re a whole bunch of smaller mistakes made by other people.

Me    That’s a really interesting one...

Bella Everyone adds towards it because your surrounding is what influences you to do those things. And then the things you do affect everyone else.

Me    That’s great. So in a sense you’re saying it was the father’s fault.

Emily I think that he was partially to blame. So was Icarus. He could have got help.

Bella He could have got help towards making the wings. Maybe. Possibly. Did he know what he was doing?

My next question asks students to shift their thinking towards a deliberately contemporary interpretation of the poem by asking how it might inform experiences in their lives. The students are immediately able to ‘fuse’ the poem with their own horizons and translate its practical content accordingly.

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282 See Appendix 7
Me  He should know. If you’re going to give a set of wings to a teenage boy, what are they going to do? [...] Can anyone think of an example of that in our contemporary world?

Bella  Yes, it is a shame. It’s like how people die in an accident that shouldn’t have happened. We give teenagers this power that they can’t control. They’ll get in a car, next minute they’ll be dead.

Emily  That’s what I was thinking too.

Me  …How many times do we hear. Generally young boys. Young men.

Bella  My dad’s always like do you want to be a vegetable. You don’t want to be like that. Make sure somebody knows where you’re going and who’s driving.

Me  Why is it that we do it then?

Bella  It’s an escape. A thrill.

Me  But I mean parents. Why do adults?

Emily  I think people like to assume the best of their children. Most of the time anyway.

Olivia  You can’t confine them too much or they’ll do something worse.

Emily  I think that’s probably what most kids in that situation will do. Go off with this random stranger and drive in his car.

Bella  They don’t tell the parent there’s an extra person in the car. Or whose driving the car.

- […]

Bella  you can’t contain them.

Me  Why not. Wouldn’t they be better off in a little container?

Bella  Children need to be free.

In this discussion can be seen the way that tradition, through the voice of a classical text, can continue to work with a contemporary audience through an act of translation. The students do not struggle, first of all, to see the worth of the text in the basic practical demands it makes on them, with Emily recognising that ‘It reminds me that everyone makes mistakes. Even the father.’ But further to this the students are able to recognise the inexhaustible potential of the poem by making some tangential, but clearly valid, connections between Icarus’ behaviour and that of teenagers in cars today, something Bella highlights when she says ‘We give teenagers this power that they can’t control.’ Not only are the students impressed by the poem’s content, but they are directed by this same content to reflect on and put into language an aspect of their lives that may otherwise be left undiscussed.
In the next extracts students write on their blogs their interpretations of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, a text that certainly enjoys classic status in our society. Grace begins by discussing the idea of ‘accomplishment’.

The ideal woman of *Pride and Prejudice* times seemed to be a combination of appearance and ‘Accomplishments’. But what defined an accomplished woman was very different to what we may think today. The characters in the book discuss an accomplished woman, one that is musical and has good taste, can sew and who is educated, but of course never more then a man. Now woman are given almost equal opportunities to men. *Thank God the idea of an accomplished woman has changed today!*

The first thing to notice is that the classic text still has something of import to say to today’s reader. In this observation, as well as those below, it is clear that the questions central to the text still resonate with a contemporary audience. In this way the classic text brings to the foreground a significant idea or question that draws a response. The classic text will also incline towards providing an answer, but this answer is never literal to the historically-effected consciousness. So while Grace acknowledges the text’s claims that accomplishment means ‘a combination of appearance and [with ironic emphasis] ‘Accomplishments,’” she is also able to critically reflect on the fact of time’s effect on her own understanding by noting that ‘Thank God the idea of an accomplished woman has changed today!’ In this Grace demonstrates her engagement with, and resistance to, the text’s claims. In the writing below, Emily again reflects on time as it has enabled her to interpret the text in a revitalised manner.

**Though times have changed a lot since when *Pride and Prejudice* was written, the pressure is still on women to fit in with today’s “Standards”. Back then to have the perfect figure and complexion, woman had to be pale, petite, with a slender waist, and hour glass figure. The “Ideal” woman of today has changed a lot but I think that the pressure still lies on woman to be perfect to please society and especially men today... Of course it has changed from 200 years ago, these days to counterbalance the images we see in the media there are people who think individuality is important, the message to woman is that everyone is different, different figures, and different features are good. But yet there is still this pressure coming from magazines and television for woman to look like the models we see. Back in Elizabeth’s time there wasn’t TV or magazines to influence people but there was still an idea of the perfect woman. To alter figures then, woman wore corsets but this alteration has changed today. Now there is plastic surgery. The changes made today can be permanent. In a way we have almost gone downhill...**

In two separate statements Emily recognises temporal distance through noting that ‘*times have changed*’ and ‘*Back in Elizabeth’s time*’ along with her observations. Along with this however, and what appears to be of more interest to her, are the similarities and resonances
that exist between her experience and that examined in the classic text. In this regard Emily recognises that ‘the pressure is still on women’ and ‘yet there is still this pressure,’ something she does while still recognising some differences between the two experiences. The classic text then is neither something alien, as it still speaks to Emily’s experience, and nor is it objectified, in that Emily insists on reading it as an historical artefact fixed by the time in which it was written. For the contemporary reader Pride and Prejudice can still be read as a proto-feminist text, but with the evolved standards that contemporary feminism maintains. The classic text has evolved, and so is contingently preserved, with the standards that are brought to bear by the hermeneutic consciousness.

Discussion

Gadamer is occasionally accused of being concerned with the conservation of ‘tradition’ at the expense of critical engagement or suspicion of such. For example, Habermas’ criticism of Gadamer’s commitment to tradition and its potential as a source of knowledge lies in his belief that ‘[d]ogmatic acknowledgment of any tradition [can] be equated with knowledge itself only if the tradition in question somehow guarantees freedom from constraint.’ For Habermas there is nothing in tradition itself that offers this guarantee, and so any acceptance of a traditional truth claim innately brings with it the potential for a forceful or irrational acceptance of the status quo. I have described a similar argument in the previous section on ‘Authority,’ but it is worth revisiting this aspect of Gadamer’s work. In doing so we can be reminded of Gadamer’s relationship with tradition as he describes it, and see how it is played out in a the situations above. It is, first of all, certain that that there lies a necessary tension between tradition and the present, and that there exists much to be criticised in the values and worldviews that are found in traditional texts. The essential partner to the hermeneutic thinker is, however, the traditional text. For Gadamer this is the case because

The “classical” is something raised above the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes... there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all the circumstances of time—a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present.

This claim might be criticised for what it does not say as well as for what it does. Gadamer does not choose to discuss in greater detail his nebulous criteria of ‘something enduring’ or ‘significance’ and it is here that Habermas’ criticisms might be justified. While we all might acknowledge that Shakespeare’s work continues, through its ongoing contemporary

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283 Habermas, "On Hermeneutics’ Claim to Universality," 316.
284 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 288.
reinterpretations, to maintain its place in classical culture, this provides no guarantee that it is not, at the same time, suffusing our culture with unproductive beliefs. It is certainly the case however that each of us, to varying degrees, is engaged in traditional culture. Whether we study Orwell’s *1984* at school, or we watch *Big Brother* on television, we are *effected* by the traditional. The hermeneutic situation demands we acknowledge that ‘...one cannot escape traditions and the preconceptions they foster; at most one can explicate the preconceptions that are built into any interpretation and see how the past operates in the present.’ Hermeneutics’ claims here are two fold—first of all we cannot escape the fact that tradition has influenced us, and secondly we can productively and creatively utilise tradition by reflecting on its useful role in shaping our prejudices and projecting them forward.

In the above discussions the engagement with traditional texts by the students is clear. I made some very deliberate choices about the texts that were used, as I believed that there was something ‘enduring’ and ‘significant’ about Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, or Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, or the experimental poetry of the early modernists. It is the students themselves though who are proof of the success of these choices through their active renewal of the texts, as evidenced in the conversations. Gadamer acknowledges that ‘[e]ven the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated.’ For me the most important aspect of the students’ work above lies in their *cultivation* of the tradition, which is demonstrated not so much by its enjoyment, but by its reinvigoration and renewal. Bella, for example, uncovers a contemporary understanding of the myth of Icarus though her observation that ‘It’s like how people die in an accident that shouldn’t have happened. We give teenagers this power that they can’t control. They’ll get in a car, next minute they’ll be dead.’ From an ancient warning about the impetuosity of youth she has reflected on her current understanding of the dangers of young people driving cars. Charlie, in a similar temporal translation, problematises digital communication as ‘...*a big part of the problem, because talking face to face is much more real and it forces you to become a part of someone else’s life...’ after having read a modernist poem about the encroaching impacts of new technology. The affirmation lies in the fact that students are able to inject the tradition with contemporary translations.

These examples also reflect Gandar’s observation that '[t]he decisive moment in the determination of hermeneutical experience is therefore the openness to tradition... Such openness lies in the notion that, in its claim, tradition is received as having something to say to

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The students’ motivation to reaffirm tradition does not lie in that fact that I have made demands on them, or forced them to engage in the chosen texts. Gandar’s ‘openness’ in the students can be seen in the intrinsic motivation they bring to trying to understand the texts with each other, as they sense the texts are worthy partners in conversation. In the above discussion my question ‘Can anyone think of an example of that in our contemporary world?’ encourages and draws on this orientation towards openness in the students, and asks them to consider what the text may still be saying to them today, and their responses, as we can see were both positive and fruitful. This is not however an uncritical affirmation, best exemplified by Zoe who, when discussing myself as a source of tradition, reminds the group that ‘I don’t necessarily agree with saying this person has had more experiences than us therefore they are superior.’ In this it is clear that the hermeneutic situation engenders and demands critical thinking. The traditional texts have not been examined as though fossilised in their temporal space, and indeed the practice of hermeneutics denies this. In the discussions above we can see that the students have made their own translations of the texts and indeed affirmed what endures in them, whilst remaining always critical of their intent.

Gadamer’s criticism of the rejection of tradition by the Enlightenment lay primarily in his rehabilitation of prejudice, the element of fore-knowledge necessary for interpretation. For anyone to be considered as a thinking and understanding person, the cultivation of prejudice, whether conscious or not, is required and it was in tradition that Gadamer found the source of these prejudices. It is of course incorrect to say that all of our prejudices are derived from classical texts, though it remains the case that much of contemporary educational material finds its roots in traditional disciplines. For the purposes of this work, and given its postmodern context, I think that culture may be more accurately located as the source of prejudice, while acknowledging that the two concepts overlap considerably. With all of this in mind, I agree with Gallagher that

‘...one cannot escape traditions and the preconceptions they foster; at most one can explicate the preconceptions that are built into any interpretation and see how the past operates in the present. Hermeneutics shows that no matter how hard one tries to escape all preconceptions, being biased constitutes the historical reality of human understanding.’

An important task, then, of the hermeneutic thinker is to acknowledge the vital role that prejudice (or preconceptions above) plays in the understanding and being of the interpreter, and along with this the interpreter must consider how these prejudices play out in the understanding of a text. It is clear that our beliefs are made by culture but, while we can’t

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288 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 90.
know the exact circumstances under which a particular prejudice was developed, it is possible, through hermeneutic consciousness, to know the facts of the process involved. In the above discussions there are several examples of students recognising and applying their prejudices, but I will draw on a few key examples that demonstrate how students are able to, in part, consciously reflect on their beliefs and the processes involved in the development of these beliefs.

In the first example Bella explicates a prejudice, in her interpretation of Of Mice and Men, when she states that ‘[w]e’ve accepted that it doesn’t matter what colour you are, everyone’s going to be equal at some point.’ Here she is responding to one of the many instances of racism that occur in the text, and she is able to articulate the fact that not only does she hold this belief but that ‘We’ve’ (her culture in general) similarly begun to hold a belief in racial equality. She also says that it will happen ‘at some point,’ and in doing so is recognising that it hasn’t happened yet, but that as time evolves so the prejudice will (or should as she says later on). Of greater interest for hermeneutic analysis is the question I posed beforehand, where I asked ‘what’s happened to us, as people?’ Through this question I am beginning the process of demanding of students that they reflect not only on their beliefs, but the fact that culture impacts on them and their interpretive faculties. Jack’s answer (A couple hundred years of slavery) demonstrates an awareness of the idea that their current shared rejection of racism is a prejudice that has been manufactured by their historical situation and tradition, and that the past is indeed ‘acting’ on the present. Emily continues with this idea when she concludes that ‘Ideas have changed’, that they are not absolute but are subject to the temporality of historical and cultural forces. In this vein of explicit reflection on the role of prejudice in interpretation, Ruby recognises that ‘growing up in the society that we have’ has had a significant impact on her understanding of the traditional text Pride and Prejudice. Similar to Bella, Ruby is able to, as Gallagher demands, ‘explicate the preconceptions’ that are at work when she critiques the place of women in the text. Ruby says that she holds ‘feminist views’ because of her cultural and traditional experience, and that this has an impact on her reactions to the text, which are both favourable and unfavourable. And finally Olivia, in encouraging Bella in another conversation to understand this idea, reminds her that ‘how you’ve interpreted it [the text] is a consequence of your history.’ Each of these students in their own way are acknowledging the role of prejudice when understanding a text.

My experience has shown that the above hermeneutic knowledge is not necessarily difficult for students to grasp. Importantly, though, Gallagher reminds us that a further examination of prejudice is required as
The hermeneutical task is to identify, in any, which preconceptions are productive (ones that further interpretation) and which are non-productive (ones that perpetrate misunderstanding). The way in which we sort out and jettison nonproductive preconceptions is not by appeal to some independent criterion of truth however. Such criterion does not exist.  

At this point students are accurately able to understand that they do have culturally-produced prejudices and that these prejudices shape their understanding of texts. There has been no explicit discussion however about whether these prejudices are true however, or that they might be productive as Gallagher describes them above. The idea of productivity is one that is extremely important, as in this lies the worth or otherwise of any interpretive event. It will be discussed in considerable detail below in the section on ‘Understanding and Phronesis,’ but for now I will say that an interpretation is productive if it leaves us with something of practical use in that might assist us in living a flourishing life and achieving our particular sense of the good. This is one criterion (though certainly not independent) that we might appeal to when making judgments about the productiveness of our prejudices. To provide, using the above discussions, an example of an unproductive interpretation I could say that if the students overlooked the examples of racism in the text, and they had no prejudicial reaction against it, the consequence would be that they had nothing to say on the matter or the text, and their interpretive work would be quickly come to an end. The absence of that particular prejudice would result in an absent reaction to the text and a sustaining of a belief that lies contrary to our values and the living of a flourishing life.

Gadamer believed as well that it took temporal distance (although he later amended this to difference more broadly) in order to differentiate between the true and untrue prejudices embedded in texts. Gander reflects this when he writes ‘...a temporal remove lends itself, at the same time, as something selective in hermeneutically productive ways, to the understanding and to the power of judgment...’ The thinking behind this is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to truly draw prejudice to consciousness when one is confronted with the mirror image of one’s own cultural beliefs. It in fact takes difference in order to recognise beliefs, and only from this difference can they be critiqued. I am of the opinion that, while this is certainly the case, other criteria (like that above) can be applied in these criticisms. Amelia recognises this above when she suggest that I am a worthwhile member of the circle as ‘...it’s beneficial that you are because you have a better understanding of life because you have more experience.’ Note that she doesn’t say I’m more intelligent, or know more facts about the world, but talks rather of experience and understanding as criteria for ‘usefulness’. The language Amelia uses, very much that of hermeneutics, is evidence that she (as well as the

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289 Ibid., 91.

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other students) has absorbed the much-discussed differences between knowledge, being and understanding. Charlie applies a similar experience criterion when he, in justifying the truth of his prejudicial reaction against technology, demands that ‘because talking face to face is much more real and it forces you to become a part of someone else’s life.’ He is making very clear judgments about what constitutes worthwhile human relations and the role technology may be playing in diminishing human contact.

To return to the idea of ‘temporal remove,’ we can see how this facet of hermeneutic experience can result in criticisms of both current and past prejudices in the examples below. Gadamer reminds us that ‘[o]nly when all their [texts’] relations to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear,’ and that this element of difference (among others) ‘…can solve question of critique in hermeneutics, namely how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones, by which we misunderstand.’ The ‘confrontation’ with a text from another era allows the students the conscious space to examine the values embedded in the text under discussion, as well as analyse their own society’s values, not always positively. In the example immediately above we saw how one era’s observations about technology enabled Charlie to reflect on his own experience. Emily does much the same when she writes (when provoked by Pride and Prejudice) that ‘…there is still this pressure coming from magazines and television for woman to look like the models we see. The changes made today can be permanent. In a way we have almost gone downhill.’

Through the horizontal encounter with the temporally othered text she is able to recognise that those issues that confronted women in that time are, first of all, similar to those that women confront today, but she further speculates that in some ways contemporary conditions are worse (as these changes can be ‘permanent’). Not only is she able to critique the values in the book, but her interpretive gestures have enabled her to critique her own prejudice by recognising that things could be worse than she realised, and that there are still many oppressive elements to contemporary culture. Lily is similarly able to make astute judgments about the subtle racism evident in Of Mice and Men by comparing two temporally different texts, one an interpretation of the other, and making observations about the racism that is largely absent in the latter production (the movie). She sees that in the movie ‘if we saw that all of the characters were being racist we might not feel as sorry for them’ as ‘they’re being mean to people and discriminating against them.’ Lily recognises that our beliefs have changed substantially over time, as has our ability to empathise with those expressing racist views. My

291 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 297.
292 Ibid., 298.
Gadamerian point is that it is only the contrasting of the texts from different cultural eras that allows her to perceive and critique these subtle differences in effect and intention.

All these ideas can be drawn together in a final discussion of the students’ demonstration of effective historical consciousness. I believe that the development of this disposition is one of the stronger elements of a hermeneutic approach to philosophising, as embedded within it are a series of qualities that make significant intellectual demands of students. Most important is the fact that this consciousness demands a rejection of subjectivity and relativism, since it develops in students an understanding of the origin of their prejudices and the importance of communication with temporal and cultural others. This, in turn, allows them to both examine and critique their beliefs. Indeed, Gadamer observes that

We are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence. Thus it is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then can we listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard.293

I read ‘hope and fear’ above as a warning against taking our own prejudice as an unobserved and uncriticised ‘truth’ that operates beneath the surface of thought. This is a guard against an unwitting subjectivism that mistakes a projection of thought on an other (text or person) as a proper interpretive event. The first, and perhaps most important, benefit in interpreting texts hermeneutically is that it allows students to draw their own historically-constituted beliefs to the surface, and consider the way in these beliefs ‘effect’ interpretation. This then leads onto a second benefit: that students are able to see and understand that their prejudices are not a given, but are in fact developed in them by tradition (in all of its forms) that is always at work.

A variety of examples in the above discussion can be presented as evidence of students demonstrating this complex understanding. Ruby recognises for example that ‘This belief came from the days where an almost misogynistic attitude was commonly expressed throughout society; from what I know these views date back to where Pride and Prejudice was set, and in the culture displayed in the book, along with many others, women were objectified.’ In her observations first of all we can see that she has recognised an idea (misogynistic attitude) and brought it to the forefront of her thinking by identifying it in a traditional text. Her use of language such as ‘society’, ‘culture’ and ‘belief’ echo some of the elementary concepts of hermeneutic understanding, in that she identifies the connection between society and culture as an inculcator of prejudice. In her writing Ruby is also locating in her cultural history an idea that ‘came from the days’ that she recognises have an ongoing effect on her own being. And so while, in one sense, Ruby is using contemporary language (misogynistic

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293 Ibid., 304.
attitude) to identify with and against the text, she has also found an historical source of that language. Note also that embedded in this identification is a criticism of the prevailing attitude of both the past and the present. Gander identifies the reciprocity of past and present when he writes that ‘[i]n the Gadamerian sense, effective history means the relation of past and present in which the past constitutively determines the present through an interplay by bringing its tradition to bear upon it.’294 Charlie equally acknowledges the history of effect by writing that ‘Therefore, I believe that being in the age that we are currently in has a big impact on the discussed notion.’ In his observations about technology he is able to readily identify ‘the age that we are currently in’ as significant factor in his interpretive work. In principle this is the same recognition as Ruby’s, but he identified not a traditional text, but a cultural era as effecting his thinking. In this he has thought in similar manner to Ruby. He has used a traditional text (modernist poetry) to draw to consciousness a significant idea of his ‘age’ (technology). This word identifies not only his immediate temporality but a span of time which, when we consider the idea he is thinking about, covers the 20th century up to the present, and correctly identifies a significant idea that has surely influenced us all. It is perhaps Olivia however who best and most succinctly identifies this aspect of the history of effect when she says simply ‘[b]ut you’ve interpreted it is a consequence of your history.’

An awareness of the history of effect as well is an awareness of flux and change over time, and the understanding that interpretations of texts are likewise subject to shifts in interpretations. This provides both opportunities and caveats when using texts as partners in philosophical discussions. Gallagher recognises this in stating:

> The teacher, as well as the student, must remain open to the inexhaustible possibilities presented by traditions... From the perspective of pedagogy, an ignorance of historical effects, or worse, a belief that tradition is controlled in historical objectification, could lead to the closing off of learning and the domination of dogmatic interpretations.295

It is in the proffering (explicitly or otherwise) of dogma by teachers to students, that access to an understanding of the history of effect is most immediately denied. In both the conversations discussed in this section, as well as those in other sections, I cannot be reasonably accused of enforcing an objective textuality on students. Just as important, as discussed particularly in the ‘Fusion of Horizons’ section, students have not been allowed an unrestricted permissiveness in their interpretive work. As always, these texts are viewed as potential sources of truth that are making their claims on us. Emily observes this balance when she writes that ‘[b]ack then to have the perfect figure and complexion, woman had to be pale,

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295 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 95.
petite, with a slender waist, and hour glass figure. The “Ideal” woman of today has changed a lot... but I think that the pressure still lies on woman to be perfect to please society and especially men today.’ Is this she first acknowledges the claim in the text that ‘ideal women’ have a certain set of characteristics that are measurable and absolute. These can be found in the text and are repeatedly referred to, either explicitly or otherwise. Emily recognises, however, that while some sense of ideality might adhere to women today, it has ‘changed a lot’ and that she is no longer bound by this image, and in fact she goes on to resist any type of stereotyping. In doing so she is resisting the ‘historical objectification’ Gallagher warns against and also, in league with this, resists the objectification of women as well. Ruby similarly identifies the past and acknowledges its salient influence, but she is not subsumed by this past and nor does she see it as a source of objective truth. The corollary of this idea is Gadamer’s reminder that

...reflection on effective history-can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are.296

If we are to resist dogma, this implies that any interpretation is contingent and is a reflection of our own temporal state, which eventually must become an existential understanding of Being. Bella indicates an increasing awareness of this idea when she writes

The still existent social expectations of women have been evident for a very long time. Although women are aware of this they still abide by them. I believe they do so is all because the fact that they don’t know any better. Meaning we have had these social standards for so long it is hard for us to notice the influences that enclose us, which seems to be a bit ironic for me to state.

In this statement Bella is suggesting a series of interrelated understandings that revolve around the history of effect. She is able to both recognise that social discourses surrounding women ‘have been evident for a very long time’ and that women ‘still abide by them’. If we take ‘abide’ for a type of prejudice, we can see that Bella has identified one element of the history of effect. Gadamer tells us as well that such reflection is an ongoing effort that has no telos, and so does Bella when she adds the proviso above that we are aware of them ‘to some extent’. She is not making any absolute claim to knowledge and she is drawing our attention explicitly to this fact. Even more acutely, however, Bella rounds out her observations on the paradox of the situation in which she finds herself so consciously involved. She finally observes

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296 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 301.
that the ‘social standards’ have been an effective influence on women for such a time that ‘it is hard for us to notice the influences that enclose us’. In describing her situation as such, she describes as well the reflectively impossible task of accounting for all of the historical effects and consequent prejudices that have shaped us. Bella’s summary of her thinking, that it ‘seems to be a bit ironic for her to state,’ aptly summarises the profound understanding she has of her existential situation as well as the incompleteness of her always historically effected understanding.

**Application**

This next section examines and provides examples of students undertaking the hermeneutic task of *application*, an idea and orientation that Gadamer appropriated from a range of sources, including legal and scriptural practices of interpretation. For Gadamer, the practice of application is a tactful one that requires the sensitivity of a hermeneutically trained consciousness, and is aware of her own prejudices as much as the language of the text.

Gadamer writes

> We can, then, distinguish what is truly common to all forms of hermeneutics: the meaning to be understood is concretized and fully realized only in interpretation, but the interpretive activity considers itself wholly bound by the meaning of the text. Neither jurist nor theologian regards the work of application as making free with the text.  

My role in discussions where application might emerge as an interpretive task must be attentive to competing demands. While I aim to encourage students to ‘concretise’ the texts under discussion, that is to make them tractable and pliable to their own horizon, I must also ensure that the texts are not used as mere springboards for the students own relativistic free-ranging fancies, in which the voice of the original author is neglected. This is another of the key differences between a Lipman P4C and my hermeneutic variation, as for Lipman the text is not a voice to be reckoned with in discussion, but is stimulus for an alternate inquiry. The conversation below, taken from Transcript 22, takes place after the students had spent some time discussing the literal elements of the poem *Sailing to Byzantium,* and illustrates the idea of application.

> Me Let’s think about some of these questions now. What’s the text actually saying? What kind of claim is it making? What’s it saying that’s true, or provocative, or interesting? Doesn’t mean you have to believe it, what do you think it might be saying?

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297 Ibid., 328.
298 See Appendix 2
Liam  Do you mean truth as in what he’s saying, his message, or do you mean true within the poem.

Me  Outside the poem, what’s the message?

[Students make some more literal interpretations]

Me  But I mean today, now.

My first challenge to the students above is that they take seriously any claims that the poem may be making in terms of truth claims. Then by encouraging them to look ‘outside’ the poem and make it relevant to ‘today, now’, I am asking that they apply the poem to their contemporary situation whilst remaining attentive to the poem. After some further discussion we come to the idea of resurrection.

Me  What would it be about that city that would resurrect you?

Liam  Because it’s so rich, not only rich in money, it’s culturally rich. You compare it to Melbourne, Sydney, they’re these new cities that aren’t disinteresting probably, but this is something else, there’s something nicer about it. You can live in this city, on a peninsular, which juts out into the Bosphorous, on three sides you’re surrounded by beautiful ocean.

Ava  It’s something to remind you that the world is a beautiful place. And that life is beautiful. I think anything that does that is capable.

Liam  I’d have to live within the old city, not the new, I’d have to live on the peninsular.

Me  So you think new cities have lost some soul?

Liam  I think so, but I also think that it’s the position of the old city. Part of it is surrounded on three sides by sea… it’s the setting, and the buildings, they’re really nice…

Me  Bella, what do you reckon? What would resurrect your soul?

Bella  In general or in this poem?

Me  In general.

Bella  Well, relating to the poem, probably my surroundings, and -

Me  -don’t worry about the poem so much.

Ava  Just anything. If you were old and you wanted to live a little bit more.

Here, after some general discussion of a literal application of the poem, I ask Bella to think more broadly about an application of the poem by asking her to think ‘in general’ about poem, and then encouraging her further by saying ‘don’t worry about the poem so much’. Ava
encourages her to think in this way as well by saying ‘just anything’. Note though that this doesn’t mean I have allowed the students to speak about just anything—they remain in conversation with ideas contained in the poem.

Bella  
Travel... Instead of being in the same place I’d rather be elsewhere and meet new people. Everything you get from travel. The food, the culture, the people surrounding me, the atmosphere, the food, the temperature. It all adds up to what becomes a great place that you love.

Ava  
Where would you go Jason, what would you do?

Me  
...I would go to Europe, and hang out in all the galleries [I list them].

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[...]

Bella  
I’d probably do all the things I wanted to do, but I haven’t yet.

Me  
Can you tell us how you would rejuvenate your soul?

Oliver  
I’d go to Jerusalem. I’d travel the holy land. Try not to get shot.

Ava  
Would you really do that?

Oliver  
It is still a beautiful place and it has a very rich history.

Ava  
It is very sacred isn’t it?

Oliver  
...The appeal isn’t necessarily in the religious importance of it, but just the rich history and the culture and its significance... it’s the home of the ideology that shaped the Western world.

Note here again that this is not a discussion in which students are free-associating the poem with their own choices of preferred ‘fun’ activities, but they are expressing a rich engagement with the poem by discussing culture, history and travel. I take up the ideas they have picked out in the poem and encourage further discussion.

Me  
So what is it about all these places that is rejuvenating? Cause they’re different aren’t they. What does this mean, this rejuvenation?

Bella  
Being in this consistent place that we all live in now, that’s the same everyday, is a routine. And then once we change that, change our routine, and we leave for somewhere else that’s different completely, it’s like resetting your body clock.

Ava  
I think that’s what it is, about all these places, it’s about reminding yourself of everything that’s beautiful. It’s about making yourself inspired. Inspiring yourself.

Bella  
If you’ve been to Paris, or you’ve been to [inaudible] or something like that, and you’ve got this great memory of it, it’ll always be there... You know if you want to appreciate something you’ll go to the place you love. And you’ll appreciate it compared to other [inaudible] travel. They
The students talk eloquently about inspiration and rejuvenation. Again however I remind the students to ‘listen’ to the poem as people in the contemporary situation that they’re in, and work with the poem in order to make it relevant to themselves.

**Me**  So what sort of claim is poem making. What’s it telling us? Saying to us today.

**Bella**  It’s giving us an example of somebody.

**Me**  What’s special about this person?

**Ava**  The poem is a reminder of a reminder [laughs]. The poem is reminding you that you can be reminded.

**Liam**  And you can change.

**Me**  Reminded of what?

**Ava**  Of reminding [laughs]. It’s reminding you that you can go out and find beauty in the world.

**Me**  Is it important that we’re reminded of that? Does that seem like an important thing?

**Bella**  Yes

**Ava**  I think it is.

The students finally agree that the poem has been important in that it reminds us that ‘you can go out and find beauty in the world.’ This is a legitimate interpretation of a poem that reminds us of our rich history, and one that has been read attentively by teenage students who have been able to work it into their own horizon.

In the work below I present some examples of student writing completed after discussions similar in intention to the above, which were to ‘concretise’ the analysed poems by
translating them into everyday situations. The below was written by Lucas about the poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*.299

One interpretation of the poem is that it suggests that the blackbird represents the unknown and that we should be content with it. I see the poem as meaning something else but this could be me projecting my opinions on it. I believe that we should not be content with the knowledge we have. While Zoe said that we can in some situations have too much knowledge, I think that to limit discovery will not benefit us. While knowledge can lead to devastation in some situations I believe that it is not the knowledge that causes this but a lack of understanding. People should consider more the effect of their actions and aim to do the right thing. Knowledge alone does not, in most cases, cause harm. To stop seeking knowledge, however can stop progression in a positive direction.

The student above is demonstrating an acute hermeneutic awareness by first of all expressing some concern that he ‘may be projecting my opinions on it’. He is also conflating interpretation with what he then goes on to do, which is to give the poem an application in his own world. This consists of speculations about the differences between understanding and knowledge and how confusion between the two causes harm.

In the writing below, Charlie and Bella responded to two other poems. The first in response to *Fall of Icarus,* and the second to *Stop All the Clocks*.300

I can apply this to my own life due to the meaning that I understand or have interpreted from it. I have taken the poem almost as a lesson to cherish life and observe your world and surroundings more. I also take from this poem, probably most importantly, that you shouldn’t live in fear of death, and to move on from loved ones dying as there is nothing that can be done. I apply this to my own life because when my loved ones die I will be able to move on. Also I will focus on life rather than death, because that’s what really matters and counts.

I accept the piece because it’s not as if I am forced into anything it’s just basically representing the loss of belief and faith in God and Christianity itself... Knowing that someone has lost something that they immensely have faith [in] and then for it to fall apart, emotionally connects you to the poem. As well as the words chosen in the poem draw you in even more so. Applying this poem to my personal life, might be how I should possibly be accepting of all religions. Instead of choosing a one way path, being scientific facts, which I find can be truth. This does not mean I can’t be open to other opinions, because the truth can be bent to an extent. Everyone’s perception of things a change from time to time by their surroundings which affect them.

299 See Appendix 3
300 See Appendix 8
Both have (quite explicitly, as they use either the word *apply* or *applying* in their responses) sought out viable translations of poems very different to their own cultural and linguistic situations. In their interpretations they sought and found a meaningfulness that for them is resonant and exists in clear recognition of the original texts.

**Discussion**

In order to understand what is meant by *application* in the hermeneutic sense, it is perhaps best to begin by stating what it is not. Grondin summarises this aptly by stating that:

> It [application] has widely been misunderstood, however, in a subjectivistic sense, one that would open the door to relativism. It was assumed here that “application” meant something like an appropriation, an interested adaptation to our situation, or some form of modernization. This would lead to a cheap form of subjectivism indeed. It is not what Gadamer intended.\(^{301}\)

What Grondin (and Gadamer) sees at risk in an incorrect apprehension of ‘application’ are several of those intentions most important in the hermeneutic situation. I noted above that I did not allow the students to engage in a free-association or a playing with the text such that its original intention, as can best be ascertained, would be lost in a game of meaning-making. In this is a clear criticism of a radical postmodern approach that might see texts as so fraught with fissures and competing discourses that no sense of intent could be rationally established. At the same time, application does not seek to, in the way of Romantic method, reproduce with absolute fidelity the original intentions of the author, and leave the work of interpretation at that. With the students, I worked towards a place instead where the integrity of the original text was maintained, while the freedom to work within the text’s horizon was encouraged. This is why I begin with questions such as *‘What’s the text actually saying. What kind of claim is it making?’* and together with the students work towards a viable set of claims that can withstand reasonable scrutiny. I also say however that *‘[it] doesn’t mean you have to believe it, what do you think it might be saying?’* In doing so I am inviting the students to resist the text at any point, as well as reminding them that we are undertaking well-reasoned speculation rather than establishing a truth about the author’s intentions.

The second criticism of incorrect application is that it is merely an ‘interested’ or ‘modernised’ appropriation that does not attempt to work with the text in an interpretive relationship, or that only changes some superficial elements of the text and leaves it otherwise untouched. In the above dialogue is a clear instance of my awareness of the second criticism, that being the superficial approach. There is some discussion of Sydney and Melbourne as

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\(^{301}\) Grondin, "Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding," 42.
being contemporary replacements for the city of Byzantium, and I allow the students to
discuss their interpretations of the poem in this sense for some time, but I also eventually
demand more interpretive work from them in a conceptual sense. This is why I say to Bella to
‘don’t worry about the poem so much’ when she is about to give further literal examples of the
poem’s subject (cities). Soon after this I ask ‘Can you tell us how you would rejuvenate your
soul?’ and the students, whilst mentioning cities, go on further to discuss ideas that are more
deeply embedded in the original text. The students’ responses are not ‘interested’ in a
subjective sense either. The conversation is swayed instead towards a discussion of
themselves and the provocations it provides to their own lives. In opening themselves towards
the poem’s ideas, by remembering experiences they have had, or considering experiences they
wish to have, the students are not merely using the poem as a reason to talk about
themselves. They are instead filtering these experiences through their experience of the poem
and the conversation that surrounds it, and summarising their understanding as (for example)
‘It’s reminding you that you can go out and find beauty in the world.’

Gadamer frequently finds similarities between the interpretation that takes place in
the application of laws, and the interpretation that takes place in the hermeneutic
understanding of texts. For Gadamer ‘[a] law does not exist in order to be understood
historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted... Understanding here
is always application.’ It is obviously the case that when a judge looks at a statute there may
be little of literal value that she can apply to the immediate situation requiring adjudication.
Each instance of human behavior requires a specific interpretation of the law such that it aptly
accords with the instance in a reasoned manner. Such is the case for textual interpretation,
and it is such that for Gadamer no interpretation can take place without the translation of the
text to the interpreter’s linguistic situation. Gadamer further makes this clear when he writes
'[a]pplication does not mean first understanding a given universal in itself and then afterward
applying it to a concrete case. It is the very understanding of the universal—the text—itself.’

In the dialogue above, as already suggested, I encouraged the students to work inside the text
when also working it into their own horizons and languages. The examples of student writing
perhaps exhibit this concretisation of texts with more clarity. In this work I had the students,
after substantial discussion, write out their interpretations whereby they made sure to clarify
how application of the various poems could be made to their own lives.

The caution with which Lucas presents his understanding is highlighted by his
statement that ‘I see the poem as meaning something else but this could be me projecting my

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303 Ibid., 336.
opinions on it.’ In this he is accounting for the fact that there were a range of views expressed about the poem, and that his own prejudices are being drawn on to make meaning. Charlie, in his work, states that ‘I can apply this to my own life due to the meaning that I understand or have interpreted from it,’ while Bella uses similar language. Each of the students, in their own way, then go on to work the poems into coherent and sensible statements of philosophical belief that all reflect the poems conceptually, but in no way reflect the literal subject matter. There is no methodical way of going about this process, and instead the students’ understanding emerges out of the discussion that took place previously. This discussion resists dialogical direction or a specifically productive intention. Davey acknowledges this when he writes:

Application is not grasped as a mere carrying out of an order, as a dutiful application of a rule but as a knowing how to render for oneself what a text asks, a knowing how to translate into one’s own terms what it asks of one.304

The students undertook this task of translation with some insight and skill. Lucas, for example, wrote that ‘I believe that it is not the knowledge that causes this but a lack of understanding. People should consider more the effect of their actions and aim to do the right thing,’ and further was able to distinguish between knowledge and understanding and the effects he had seen due to a misunderstanding of this distinction. He goes onto to claim that the poem suggests that ‘[k]nowledge alone does not, in most cases, cause harm. To stop seeking knowledge, however can stop progression in a positive direction.’ Charlie, in his interpretation of his chosen poem, writes that ‘I have taken the poem almost as a lesson to cherish life and observe your world and surroundings more... I will focus on life rather than death, because that’s what really matters and counts.’ And finally, Bella reflects on her own prejudices and recognises that ‘I should possibly be accepting of all religions. Instead of choosing a one way path, being scientific facts, which I find can be truth. This does not mean I can’t be open to other opinions, because the truth can be bent to an extent.’ The ‘undutiful knowing’ that saw these students undertake the task of ‘rendering’ these difficult, modernist poems into useful claims of their own that suggest a rigorous and considered application can develop into something approaching practical wisdom. This lies far from the ‘cheap form of subjectivism’ rightly criticised above that occurs when application is not undertaken with the correct hermeneutic attentiveness.

304 Davey, Unquiet Understanding : Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics, 111.
Play and the Question

For hermeneutics, a critical element of interpretation lies in the ability to ask questions of the text that the interpreter is trying to understand. Additionally, the interpreter must be attuned to the questions that the text itself is trying to answer, as well as the answers that the text posits. These various questions and answers cannot be arbitrary, subjective or disinterested but, properly composed, must show that the act of interpretation has begun. This is due to the fact that these questions are evidence of an already implicit and incipient understanding of the text. So it can be said that a ‘correct’ question of a text assumes a correct understanding of the text. In this we can again see the circularity of the hermeneutic situation—that which Heidegger called the virtuous (rather than vicious) circle. Besides this immediate aspect of hermeneutic questioning, Gadamer further illuminates the relation between understanding and questioning by writing:

This is the reason why understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else’s meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject. \(^{305}\)

We have seen that Gadamer’s understanding is never about the historical objectivising of texts, nor the psychological reconstruction of authorial intention, but one that is generated through a dialectic of meaning via a fusion of horizons. His interpretation is an opening up of not only texts themselves, but those prejudices brought to bear on texts by the interpreter. This opening up can be achieved by an authentic questioning that generates the possibility of meaning and understanding. To stop at the one question, and leave the text behind once this is answered, is not the hermeneutic way either. Gallagher observes that

...the structure or logic of play is the same as that of questioning... All play has the structure of a question which interrogates not only the world but also the player’s own preconceptions so that the familiar gets encountered precisely as the unfamiliar. \(^{306}\)

The role of the question in hermeneutic interpretation is for it to ‘play’ with the text through a persistence so that the text is broken open and becomes involved in a ‘game’ of meaning that is never properly resolved.

In my work with students I draw on the hermeneutics of questioning in several ways. The first idea I wanted to teach students was not so much about questions in texts, but more about a hermeneutic work ethic of persistent questioning and play. The discussion below, taken from Transcript 17, demonstrates how I achieve this explicitly through students’ direct

\(^{305}\) Gadamer, Truth and Method, 368.

\(^{306}\) Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 163.
engagement with philosophical texts, in this case a small section of text by Gadamer himself on questioning. After having read it aloud, I ask an initial question of the students, which asks that they clarify the text’s meaning.

Me Now what does that mean, preserve his and her, because this is an old text, orientation towards openness.

Zoe Well, cause we, as humans, we can become really square... narrow minded. Very easily, because we assume, we make assumptions about things, so we need to preserve and keep our open mindedness when it finally comes to us. Or it can cause us a lot of trouble and we can miss out on a lot of life with our narrow mindedness.

Charlie Great

Me I don’t even know what to add to that.

Sienna I don’t even know what that meant. It got a bit tangled.

Zoe Sorry.

Me Who can re-explain what Zoe said? In their own words.

Amelia It’s basically saying that people’s narrow mindedness and only sticking to what they think is right without knowing enough about it really can mean that they don’t. Give them a narrow minded view of life. It’s just about narrow mindedness.

Me Ok. So what’s the connection this person makes between questioning and openness?

Ava If you don’t question things then you won’t learn anything new about what you believe.

Me And you were going to say something Emily?

Emily So if you’re open to other things then you can ask about it and know more.

Charlie More than one point of view on a particular subject. By asking more questions.

It is clear that the students have grasped what is not necessarily a complex idea—that persistent questioning is necessary in order to ‘learn anything new about what you believe.’ Later in the conversation I draw students attention to the observation that I may have been doing much of the question-asking.

307 See Appendix 1
My concern was I was doing too much question asking. And this [handout] tells us that you need to be asking questions as well as me.

Charlie We sort of build off your question though. The statements are almost like a question in a way. The statements that we say.

Amelia You need to start us off.

Zoe We need a starter.

Charlie We need a starting question.

Bella You don’t have to always be the person that starts us off though.

Emily But he sort of guides us.

Charlie makes a significant tangential observation here that I will discuss in greater detail below, in that he observes that ‘the statements are almost like questions.’ In distinguishing a hermeneutic approach to philosophising from the Lipman method, I have not demanded of students that they articulate and vote on a specific question that must be answered in a session. Therefore, in a hermeneutic discussion, questions tend to develop and emerge and then be subsumed by further questions that, as Charlie correctly observes, take the form of statements or deliberately speculative answers which serve to further generate discussion. What the students further go on to say is that my initial questions are a ‘starter’ that ‘guides’ the students, a role that does not preclude hermeneutic openness. I then ask the students to further illuminate meaning in the quote.

Me Ok. So what’s the art of questioning then.
Sienna The art of thinking. Is that what it said?
Me Yes. I’ll ask you a more specific question. What does it mean to question ever further?
Bella To go on and want more, in such a way.
Zoe It's to expand.
Zoe Asking a question
Emily Not just accept an answer.
Zoe -Yes.
Sienna -Or even when you think you know the answer to the question.
Bella So to be open to other's opinions.-
Zoe -And not be narrow minded.

Charlie It says here that the art of questioning is the art of questioning even further. So is the art of questioning the art of thinking, or is the art of questioning the art of questioning.
Zoe: Well it says here that-

Charlie: - and is the art of questioning the art of questioning even further or is it the art of questioning just the art of questioning.

Zoe: Well it says here that the art of questioning is not the art of resisting the pressure of opinion. So if we could find the opposite of that supposedly that is the art of questioning. So what is the opposite of that.

Sienna: He mean coming to opinion.

Zoe: Maybe.

Charlie: That sentence there makes very little sense to me.

Me: Which bit?

Charlie: The second last sentence.

Sienna: The art of questioning equals the art of thinking. The art of questioning also equals the art of questioning.

Zoe: This is like math equation.

The students here demonstrate the skill and confidence they have developed as a group when interpreting texts. The first thing that must be noted is how comfortable they are in speculating aloud when unsure of an answer, in testing their thinking in a group situation without fear of embarrassment at being wrong, and in building on and assisting each other in grasping the meaning of a complex text. It is this intersubjective understanding that makes their interpretive work so acute, as much as their ability to analyse texts. Charlie, for example, says that ‘[t]hat sentence there makes very little sense to me’. Together however the group decides that questioning is ‘to go on and want more’, ‘expand[ing]’, ‘want[ing] more’ and ‘not just accepting an answer’. Each of these contributions (along with several others) accurately summarise Gadamer’s text as well as the students’ own experiences of questioning. They all suggest, as well, the ‘openness’ that is so important to the hermeneutic orientation; an openness that rejects both entrenched belief as well as uncritical acquiescence. The students are also articulating with clarity the idea that their own prejudices must be put ‘at risk’ in this persistent questioning by acknowledging that ‘you must be open to others’ opinions’ and ‘not be narrow minded’. I finally ask students to summarise their understanding of the excerpt.

Me: ...Who can summarise what they think this is all about.

Bella: It’s all about us taking action instead of you.

Me: What sort of action Bella?

Bella: Asking questions.
Sienna I thought that was what it was all about indirectly. Like he was giving us this question and then you would question his power.

Bella This is directing us now though. It’s doing the same thing.

Sienna You’re just trying to direct us even more subtly.

Charlie Direct us into indirect.

Lily But he has to.

Bella You’re changing our path, and which way we should go. Instead of taking this door, we’ll take that door.

Me Amelia

Amelia It’s about questioning in order to broaden your knowledge. That’s it, and let’s move on.

The conversation finishes with a few appropriate concluding observations from the students. Bella talks about ‘us taking action [asking questions] instead of you’, the fact that I am explicitly ‘directing’ students to do so, and Amelia (somewhat impatiently!) compares questioning with ‘broaden[ing] your knowledge.’ In the next conversation, taken from Transcript 18 and which took place a few days later, several of the students reflect on the difficulties of the persistent questioning of and playing with texts that I encourage them to undertake. In this excerpt, students describe the process of questioning and play as analysis (or over analysis in some opinions). Sophie begins by observing that sometimes she felt that too much questioning of texts takes place.

Sophie We started trying to find things in it that weren’t really there. It was like how is this represented in that? You were just grasping at straws. That word could be used in this particular situation which could possibly mean this. You stopped finding how it meant to you and you were just trying to make it relate to other things even if you didn’t feel it.

Me That’s interesting. Ok.

Charlie But wouldn’t people have different opinions and so not everyone feels the same thing about it so-

Sophie -Yeah yeah yeah I know. We well and truly finished analysing it. And then we did it again.

Charlie Yes. We did do it for an hour and a half or something.

[...]

Me Ok. So Sophie your definition of over analysis is?

Sophie It’s not a definition. I’m not defining over analysis but saying I felt, towards this poem, that I personally, not to put my opinion on anyone else, found that I ended up grasping at straws by the end of analysing the poem...
- [general chatter about this]

Me Who else thought we overanalysed this poem?
Bella We always overanalyse everything.
Ava That's kind of what we do isn't it?
Amelia We've had this conversation. We're overanalysing the concept of overanalysing. It's ridiculous.
Olivia So let's move on.
Amelia I mean it's obviously not going to change, so we might as well get on with it.
Sophie Doesn't it feel like we have to constantly question everything we say?
- [several students say yes]
Sophie Why can't we just say something and that be said.
Amelia A little bit of questioning's ok.
- [general chatter about this - untranscribable]
Me Emily, can you start again.
Emily You're not the one who starts the over analysing stuff. It's someone else.
You just keep on going.
Sophie Jason heavily encourages it.
Me What do I do?
Sophie When someone says something, questioning something, [voice pretending to be me] 'wow that's, keep talking about this.'
Bella You're always like, talk about that more.
- [general chatter about this - untranscribable]
Me Charlie, you've got your hand up. What do you want to say?
Charlie ... I think that it's tedious but I think it's sort of necessary to over analyse things because you understand it more. And we were talking about that whole questions thing when we spent an hour and a half the other day, and that was the start of our discussion about how questioning things leads to thinking. You need to question things.
Me Maybe we can balance things out a little bit more.

The hermeneutic approach to interpretation and philosophical thinking is not always painless! In the above conversation it is clear that I make specific and sometimes difficult demands of students, in that I will not allow them to (as Sophie might wish) ‘just say something and that be said.’ Hermeneutics demands persistent questioning, not only of texts, but of the participants in the discussions that take place. Sophie also recognises this when she says ‘Doesn’t it feel like we have to constantly question everything we say?’ Emily responds by making the observation (which I believe is demonstrated consistently throughout this Analysis chapter as a
whole) that ‘You’re [meaning me] not the one who starts the over analysing stuff. It’s someone else. You just keep on going.’ Here is the clear suggestion that, despite my initial concerns above that I may have been doing too much of the questioning, it is the students who are doing the hard work of questioning and sustaining the play with texts, while I encourage and maintain the conversations’ dynamic. Sophie acknowledges this by saying that ‘Jason heavily encourages it.’ Charlie draws the conversation to an apt conclusion by reminding the group of the connection between questioning and thinking, which was the idea first introduced earlier. He agrees that ‘you need to question things’ because ‘questioning leads to thinking.’

Besides the relationship between questioning, playing, and thinking, there is a further relationship between questioning and the text, so that ‘[i]n order to answer the question put to us [by the text], we the interrogated must ourselves begin to ask questions. We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the traditionary text is the answer.’308 This reconstruction of the text’s question, the question that it attempts to answer, is another significant element of the hermeneutic approach that I challenge students to do. In being sure to distinguish the Lipman and Gadamerian approach, I deliberately do not go through the same process, typical of Lipman, in which a question is negotiated prior to dialogue that the students must then answer. Hermeneutics demands a more subtle and circular approach to this reconstruction. Who in an authentic discussion, for example, demands that a question be agreed upon before that discussion takes place? Remember, after Rorty, hermeneutic discussion is not an inquiry in the epistemological mode, but a conversation between people in which a matter at hand is the focus of the philosophical gaze. These various modes of questioning: of prejudices, of the text, of reconstruction, and their relationship to thinking, are illuminated below, in an excerpt from Transcript 21. I begin by asking students to comment on any aspect of text they found interesting.

Me  What belief, or understanding or idea about the world does this poem make you think about, in terms of what you actually believe. What’s drawn out of you in a sense. What do you think about that you may never have thought about.

Bella  A person’s death is worth more than it’s put out to be.

Me  So is that a belief that you’ve always had?

Bella  No, I don’t think so. I’ve never really thought about it.

Zoe  Isn’t it generally looked upon that a person’s life is of more value than a person’s death.

Bella   Yes, I agree with that, but they can be recognised more.

Zoe    I was agreeing with you.

Bella   If you look today, we recognise the famous people, like Michael Jackson, all the people that die, that have become famous, and are important to the public in some way. But if an old lady dies or a little boy, depending on the story, it’s not going to be out there, nobody really cares, apart from their own family.

Zoe     They do put it out there, they put it in obituaries. And also they’re generally on the news as well.

[general discussion about this]

The students are discussing W.H.Auden’s poem *Musee des Beaux Arts* and Bella’s response to it, ‘[a] person’s death is worth more than it should be’, already implies that she has found a question in the text worth pursuing, that being a simple rewording of her answer (What is the worth of a person’s death?). Zoe takes up Bella’s response, and together they build on it with further empirical examples. My next question works with this as well, and asks a question of Bella that requires her to further develop her thinking.

Me      I want to concentrate on what Bella’s saying. So you’re saying that really only famous people are remembered.

Bella  They get this huge significance in the news, in the paper, over and over, compared to general people, who also have probably done many heroic things.

Ethan   They get more fame from dying.

Bella  Yes.

Zoe     … the general public, a small percentage of them get fame from dying.

Bella  I’m not saying fame’s important-

Zoe     - I’m just saying that you hear about a small percentage, a very small percentage I must say, of the general public who have died. Like the kid who got shot at the skatepark last year.

Bella  That’s because it’s a good story.

Zoe     Yes but that’s the thing, they’re still getting recognised for it…

Emily  Isn’t that kind of what happened to Icarus though? He was remembered for his death.

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See Appendix 16
Emily’s contribution here is important, and hermeneutically attuned, in that she is drawing the group’s thinking towards the book—she is maintaining the text’s role as a participant in the discussion. She is also reflecting the answer the text gives the interpreter to the group’s question. My next question asks the students to reflect on whether or not the questioning so far has created a change in ‘beliefs’ (or prejudices).

Me So where are we at the moment?
Zoe Lost.
Me In terms of the poem and reflecting on your beliefs. Bella, you said you’d actually changed one, is that right?
Bella What?
Me You said I hadn’t actually thought about that before.
Charlie Maybe not changed, but I think maybe gained. She said she didn’t really think about it.
Bella I really thought about how someone’s death can really mean something to the public. I hadn’t really thought about that. So obviously in this community no one really cares. We don’t hear anything about his family at all. Or his father saying oh, my son’s dead, now what’s going to happen, it’s all because of me. I created these wings, and now I’ve failed him and he’s dead.
Jack He didn’t fail Icarus, it was Icarus’ mistake to sail too close to the sun.
Bella Yes, but the father would still have guilt.
- [general discussion about this]

Here we can see clear evidence of the fact that Bella’s prejudice about the matter under discussion has developed and changed through the dialogical encounter. Bella acknowledges that ‘I hadn’t really thought about that,’ when reflecting on what the death of innocence might mean to the public. In this we can see again a clear engagement with a question that the text is putting to the reader, and the fact that the discussion of this question means that the text has already been interpreted to some extent. In the continuation of the discussion below, students further develop their deciding of the question that integrates a development of their interpretation of the text. Note as well that my question gestures towards the application of the text, something discussed above.

Bella Yes, but you don’t hear any remorse, or empathy, from anyone in this story, or in the picture.
Zoe I don’t quite understand what you’re getting at.
Bella I’m saying that he’s not really being recognised, he’s only known for his death, but he’s not being recognised by his surroundings.

Me What might this say about our life today? What can we draw from it?

Emily People around you might have things going on. Just say you’re the farmer of the story, and Bella’s the Icarus of the story, and something terrible’s happening to her but I’m just sitting here, [inaudible] I don’t think about it.

Bella About my death, Emily?

Me So explain how that helps us live our lives.

Emily Like we were saying before, just being more aware of what’s going on in life around us.

Me Is this poem suggesting that we’re not really aware of what’s going on in our lives, around us? What do people think?

The students are doing a sound job of sustaining their dialogue, but I present the above question to provoke some further discussion around the question they have extracted from the text.

Jack If you heard about someone you’d never met dying, you wouldn’t really have felt that bad. If you felt bad for every person that died you’d probably have a miserable existence.

Bella I’m not saying that everyone should be recognised, but I think to some extent.

Lachlan Everyone should be recognised equally. Instead of having one person recognised more than others.

Bella Agreed.

Lachlan [inaudible]

Emily It’s kind of like the poem. He’s recognising all the very minor characters, they get a paragraph each. The same as Icarus, who’s the main character.

Me So the poem’s talking about recognition then? Is that it? Is that right?

Charlie I don’t think so.

Jack People are going to notice the celebrity guys. But if someone they don’t know dies, they wouldn’t really notice. They wouldn’t really care if they didn’t hear about what happened to them.

Bella Sometimes the stories are awful, and they make you feel terrible when you hear them.

Charlie But it’s about the way that they die. Not them themselves and how you feel about them.
Zoe You never hear about this person who died in their sleep, it's more like this person was raped and bashed and died of bleeding on the brain.

Me So what might the poem be telling us to think about then?

Charlie What was that thing we said before?

Me I don’t feel like we’ve got there yet.

Charlie Yeah.

Zoe The thing is we’re going around in circles and we’re not really coming to a conclusion. Why do we all have to agree?

Me You don’t have to agree.

At this point the students are wandering about slightly in their discussion so I remind students to maintain the text’s question at the forefront of their thinking through a couple of prompts. Zoe notices that ‘we’re going around in circles’ and I remind her that ‘You don’t have to agree.’ Charlie draws the group back to a contribution made by Emily earlier in the discussion.

Charlie Yeah, what did Emily say before, about what was the actual meaning we got of it, with the life and death thing. I actually forgot...

Zoe The life and death thing?

Charlie I don’t know, notice more or something. I think it was both ways, that you could sort of notice more or something. So maybe it is about recognition then. But just about life and death. I think we’re just focussing on the death. It seems to me that once someone’s dead, what can you do? You just have to move on and continue life or something. You can’t keep living in someone’s death.

Zoe How long were the mourning periods. Would they mourn for the rest of their life if they were widowed or something.

Me I don’t know. Right, we might wind it up there, I’m going to put some questions on the board.

Zoe Really?

Emily Can we have a talk about, a summary? I've forgotten.

Me Of the poem. Ok.

Me A comment maybe from everybody. The question is what might be a true interpretation of the poem, as it applies to our everyday lives...

In my question, which is designed to conclude the discussion, you can see how I have conflated ‘question’, ‘truth’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘application’ into a single challenge. The intention in my question is to establish that, in the best Gadamerian sense, any interpretation of a text must seek to both uncover the question that text presents to the interpreter, as well as engage
interpreters in the answer that the text presents through a further process of question and answer.

Charlie Which ever way you read it, that you need to notice more in your life, whether it be... I prefer the original way, that you notice life more, and maybe not live in other people's death. Other people might take it the other way, that you need to recognise people dying more.

Me Bella?

Bella Recognise your significance more on earth and possibly your surroundings, be more aware of what's around you.

Jack Enjoy your life without worrying so much about death.

Bella Yeah, agreed.

Me Talk a little but more about that Jack, that's kind of a new one we haven't really heard that so much.

Jack Well, with this story, the way it's been written, it's going on with detail about spring, the ocean and then just at the end Icarus is drowning, but you shouldn't really worry too much about that.

Me Cause he had a glorious life maybe?

Jack Yes, he flew.

Bella So live in the moment... and don't fear death. I think that's really important.

Zoe No day but today.

Bella The only thing that can hold you back is death and taxes.

The students responses are illuminating and thoughtful, and their prejudices have evidently been developed over the course of the discussion. In this way we can see how vital the quality of the various questionings is to hermeneutics and understanding, as well as the ongoing notion of the ‘play’ of meaning. In the above excerpts the students acknowledge the relationship between questioning and knowledge, extract the questions from the texts under discussion, and question and build on each others contributions until their own prejudices have been brought into play and developed. Note as well the lack of a particular structure or method to the conversations that is so typical of play, and how it contrasts with the series of steps and processes intrinsic to the Lipman P4C approach.

Discussion

In terms of the importance that Lipman and Gadamer place on the question and questioning in philosophy it appears that there is little to distinguish the two. Lipman, however, sees the role of the initial question as a largely autonomous development that lies at the beginning of a
method oriented towards a goal, where the teacher’s further questions are designed to elicit, via a traditional Socratic approach, a defined concept. Gadamer, at first glance, might appear to agree with some of this, but I see that there are several substantial differences between these approaches, along with the similarities. I will begin first with Gadamer’s association of understanding with the text’s questioning orientation towards the interpreter and world. For Gadamer, the first task of the interpreter is to grasp a question that the text is asking. In this regard he writes

We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the traditionary text is the answer... Reconstructing the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer itself takes place within a process of questioning through which we try to answer the question that the text asks us... For the text must be understood as an answer to a real question. 310

In this first distinction the text’s role in generating a question, a role that it might play in Lipman’s approach, is different in that students are required to first begin the process of interpretation before a question can be asked. The role of the text in the Lipman approach is to inspire or act as a stimulus for a question that might be on the student’s mind. This may or may not fit Gadamer’s criteria for a question, in that students may well use the text as cause to pursue their own independent and subjective inquiry. There is no requirement that the student ‘reconstruct the question’ of the text, or that any effort to interpret the text must be made. Note as well that the hermeneutic question emerges through ‘a process of questioning’, which means that the students do not merely peruse the text, but undertake a demanding analysis of it before a question emerges. For Lipman, the relationship between text and student is casual and causal, rather than engaged and merged. To me, the superficial relationship between student and text in the Lipman method, compared to that in hermeneutics, marks one of the significant differences in my approach. Importantly, it is one that means students are not required to undertake that conversation with the other (text in this case) that might be substantially horizon expanding. While Lipman’s use of the text does fit the current trend for student-centered inquiry, I think that students are more challenged and enriched by engaging in the classic questions that classic texts inspire. When, for example, I ask my students in the discussion above ‘[w]hat might this say about our life today? What can we draw from it?’ it is this element of the hermeneutic approach that I am directly addressing. In my question is the explicit belief that the text has presented the students with an enduring question that demands attention. The students are clearly, in the discussion above, discussing questions of death, recognition and acknowledgement. The question of the text is the theme of the discussion. As well as this, in my question is the further direction to students that the text is, as

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well as a question, an answer to that question. Where Lachlan answers ‘[e]veryone should be recognised equally. Instead of having one person recognised more than others,’ he is acknowledging the existence of this answer in the text, one that only emerges after a substantial amount of questioning and conversation. This is not merely a process of conservation however, as I have demonstrated in the ‘Authority’ section above that students are able to criticise these answers as well.

Further to this is the demand that the questions I ask result in an ‘experience’ of the text. Gadamer emphasises this in observing ‘[i]t is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience. We cannot have experiences without asking questions.’ In doing so he is positing a particular type of question about the subject matter and reveals the text as being something other than what it first appeared to be. For Gadamer, there is such a thing as a right and wrong question, and he is clear about the importance of asking the right questions when interpreting texts. A wrong question encourages the interpreter to act incorrectly against the text and the principles of interpretation. This could be done by encouraging students to recreate the author’s intention, or project their own prejudices on a text, or repeat the text’s own horizon as their own without any attempt at merging. Risser observes that correct questioning

...opens up the being of the questioned and doing so is the holding open of possibilities. Questioning is not a positing, but a probing of possibilities that come out of and are taken up by the Sache. For Gadamer the point is not so much that questions then get answered, that possibilities are actualized.

It is the mark of the hermeneutic thinker that his questions ‘break open’ a text and that possibilities are generated and realised through the ensuing conversation. As always, the purpose is about playing with possibilities as much as finding answers, and again this distinguishes hermeneutics from the Lipman method. A question in hermeneutics, which can also take the form of a statement, is a type of inventive speculation that occurs naturally in the flow of discussion. One of my opening questions above, where I ask ‘[w]hat might this say about our life today? What can we draw from it?’ is a clear example of an question designed to ‘probe the possibilities’ of the text. Note that I don’t ask ‘[w]hat was the author thinking when he wrote this?’ or suggest my own interpretation in the question. It challenges the students to apply the poem in a merged sense to their own experience, but does not demand any particular type of application. Zoe provides a type of actualisation in her question by asking

‘Isn’t it generally looked upon that a person’s life is of more value than a person’s death?’ as does Emily in her question and answer statement ‘Isn’t that kind of what happened to Icarus though? He was remembered for his death.’ Because of the authenticity, or the ‘correctness’, of the questioning, the students are not parroting the text but are genuinely experiencing it through their reciprocal and speculative questions and answers.

Another distinction between the hermeneutic and Lipman approaches in terms of questioning lies in the question’s relationship to method. For Lipman it is clear that the inquiry cannot begin until a question has been negotiated and clearly articulated by the inquiring community. Gallagher recognises however that in hermeneutics a ‘...question is implicitly raised even if not explicitly iterated. The teacher, of course, may [my italics] express the question in defining the theme of the lesson,’ though this may not necessarily happen. In my hermeneutic philosophising with students I did not, as is common in P4C, decide on a negotiated question with the class before the discussion proper could begin. There was no writing of questions on the board, or taking of votes to decide on the ‘best’ question to answer, as that method recommends. Instead, as can be seen in the discussions above, it took some time for a question to emerge, and it would not be unusual for that question to never be ‘explicitly iterated’ as Gallagher observes. I generally begin conversations with questions such as ‘What do you think about that you may never have thought about?’ but from then there is no moment as such where we agree on a question. It is clear however that, at some point in the discussions, a question has been arrived at and is the focus of conversation.

We have also seen the stages and steps of the inquiry process recommended by P4C practitioners and delineated in previous sections. The process is procedural, methodical, and closely resembles the inquiries that take place in scientific communities, all of which again reveal Lipman’s epistemological program and his Deweyan influences. In addition to this, the questioning role assumed by the teacher is that exemplified by a traditional Socratic approach—one that strategically guides students towards the goal of concept development through argument and the revealing of inconsistencies in thinking. Gadamer’s stance however is that:

Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter).

I am well aware of the sophistry that even young students can engage in when trying to justify an incorrect argument while I have been in the Socratic mode of teaching. Many of my

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313 Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, 162.
questions above however take the form of gentle encouragement to students go forward with their thinking, to consider the texts we are studying more closely, and to find the value in their incipient ideas. In doing so I am deliberately not acting in the manner of the Lipman-styled Socratic questioner. For example, I often say or ask things like ‘[w]hat do you want to say?’, ‘[s]o is that a belief that you’ve always had?’, ‘I want [us] to concentrate on what Bella’s saying’ and ‘[t]alk a little but more about that Jack.’ In effect I am asking students to put more language into their thoughts, or put more thought into their language, and express and approximate the being that is reflected in their efforts to interpret texts (the ‘subject matter’ in the quote above). Here, another of Gadamer’s reflections on questioning is, in conclusion, particularly germane:

The priority of the question in knowledge shows how fundamentally the idea of method is limited for knowledge, which has been the starting point for our argument as a whole. There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable.315

I do not use questions as normally understood by method, neither do I imagine my students do, whose questioning will be discussed further below. While I once kept a laminated set of Socratic questions by my side during P4C inquiries, I soon learned of how little use they were in the real ebb and flow of discussion. I even suspect that if one were to ask Socrates himself what his ‘method’ of questioning was, he would have little to say that would be immediately applicable to another’s practice of question-asking. Rather than by way of method, through my contributions I aim to maintain a momentum of play in which I seek to discover and illuminate the strength in students’ ideas. Bella best recognises this when she says ‘[y]ou’re always like, talk about that more,’ in recognising my role in discussions.

For Gadamer, philosophical thinking in the mode of interpretation is not a process of inquiry but a playing with ideas, and the methodological imperative is pushed aside in favour of a thinking and questioning orientation that more closely resembles aesthetic engagement. Bingham, in reflecting this orientation, writes

It is the educational engagement of teacher and student that must keep the question (the dice) in play for as long as the subject matter at hand requires a questioning attitude. Such a gaming process suspends the intentionality inherent in the philosophy of the subject, and it inaugurates an intentionality that does not want to know exactly what its own outcome will be.316

315 Ibid., 359.
We can see immediately that the goal distinctive in the Lipman method is explicitly rejected by Bingham’s (and Gadamer’s) hermeneutics. Instead we have the belief that interpretation is both ‘intentionless’ and projects itself forward under the momentum of the natural rhythms of reciprocal play and intrinsic movement. There is no effortful Socratic figure that, through strategic and intentional questioning, pushes the conversation towards a concept-oriented conclusion. Instead, hermeneutic discussion finds its own pace and path through the impetus of the students’ interest and the presence of a teacher that does not ‘methodise’ or organise, but illuminates and draws out the playful contributions the students make. They are playful not in the sense that they are not serious, but in the sense that the contributions the students make are speculative approximations and a thinking-aloud in a toing and froing motion in which they do not expect judgment as such, not by the Socratic critic at any rate. The hermeneutic questioner does not have the same purpose as the Socratic, but it is incorrect to say that he has no purpose at all. While he might not know what the outcome is, it is important that he is able to keep the game’s play and momentum flowing, and this requires a different type of questioning and understanding of intersubjective talk. Gadamer observes that ‘[p]lay clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself... It happens, as it were, by itself.’ This may be the most apt description of the role that the questioner plays in hermeneutic dialogue, which is to allow the discussion to happen without recourse to deliberate and dissonant verbal interactions motivated by a need to maintain a dialogic and goal-driven flow.

I now come to the connection between questioning and play, or what is equally well expressed as the difference between dialogue and discussion. Gallagher observes the similarity between play and questioning as follows:

> The structure or logic of play is the same as that of questioning, which we have called the most responsible form of thinking. By nature it challenges the real, and in so doing it opens up possibilities which form the player’s own responses... Playing always brings out the undetermined possibilities of the player and the undetermined meanings of the world.

This is not to say that questioning is always playing, but Gallagher is suggesting that through hermeneutic playing we are always questioning the world in the hope of understanding it. If we first think of children playing, it is evident that they are understanding their experience by inventing their own rules and worlds with which to explore their curiosity and desires. Equally apparent are the existence of nebulous ‘rules’ of engagement, which are inexpressible and in a constant state of flux. In fact, it makes little sense to ask children what the rules of their

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318 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 163.
playing are, and neither does it make much sense to ask what the goal of their playing may be. They are absorbed in the work of play in the same way that we should be in absorbed the work of philosophical thinking, such that we recognise only on reflection that ‘...all playing is a being-played,’ and we were played by the game of understanding as much as we played the game. In the discussions above, the first evidence of play then is only available to us in absence—the absence of specific sets of questions, commonly agreed goals, definitive ends to the discussion, and a recognisable product of discussion. What is in evidence throughout is what Bingham describes below:

...language is what it is by way of its enactment within the to-and-fro of intersubjective engagement. Likewise, a question is only a question within the context of the interlocutors’ engagement with that question. Thus, when a question is posed, it is on the field of human interaction where its ‘truth’ is worked out. The locus of questioning and play finds its manifestation not in method or product, but in the ebb and flow of discussion that is mediated not by Socratic examination, but by the tacit intersubjective trust and understanding that is generated within the hermeneutic community. In this regard my examples are not necessarily interpretive insights, but those moments where the play of ideas alternates with the recognition of the other in conversation. This motif of play is best exemplified above in the exchange between Zoe and Charlie where Charlie asks ‘...is the art of questioning the art of questioning even further or is it the art of questioning just the art of questioning?’ and Zoe replies ‘[w]ell it says here that the art of questioning is not the art of resisting the pressure of opinion. So if we could find the opposite of that supposedly that is the art of questioning. So what is the opposite of that?’ They are tossing ideas back and forwards between each other in an unstructured attempt at finding an answer. There are several other examples of this above. But further to the recognition of the other in their game, Bella says ‘[y]ou’re changing our path, and which way we should go,’ in a direct challenge to the ‘rules’ of the game as she sees them, but which had not been expressed previously. Charlie also says ‘[w]e sort of build off your question though’ in order to further affirm and negotiate a ‘rule’ as he believes it should be. Zoe says states at one stage that ‘I was agreeing with you’ in order to affirm her solidarity with others in the conversation. She also bluntly answers ‘Lost’ when I ask ‘So where are we at the moment?’ Taken together these examples are clear evidence of Bingham’s ‘field of human interaction where truth is worked out’ and equally clear evidence of the existence of a playful philosophising without method.

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319 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 106.
320 Bingham, "The Hermeneutics of Educational Questioning," 558.
The Event of Understanding, Phronesis and Truth

With this being the last section of analysis I will conclude my demonstration of a hermeneutic approach to philosophising with extended excerpts in which, with less analytic commentary than previously, the moderated flows of conversation will exhibit a final collation of important hermeneutic ideas. In doing so I will show the development of students’ autonomy and their practising a hermeneutic orientation to philosophical thinking. It is important to note that these conversations were amongst the last to take place after several months of work by the students and myself. As well, I have said very little so far about the goal of interpretation as it develops philosophical thinking. I will therefore justify my approach by using ideas such as ‘the good’ and phronesis, and discuss the reciprocal relationship they have with tradition and understanding. Conjointly, I will show that my reliance on hermeneutics as a theoretical basis for this work results in a practical philosophy that is fitting for the classroom. Figal, in discussing exactly this, states that:

In reference to the process of understanding it [hermeneutics] is not "useful" in the way that political knowledge is. Rather it exposes the space of a playing for the completions of understanding and is therefore a "situating" of understanding. If one characterizes this space of a playing as the free space, wherein communicating action can occur at all, then one can say of philosophical hermeneutics that it is a contribution to a phenomenology of freedom. The phenomenology of freedom, however, incorporates practical philosophy into itself. And so, in philosophical hermeneutics this incorporation occurs in such a way that practical knowledge, phronesis, is conceived as understanding in the space of a playing of language. In particular this occurs in that the space of a playing of tradition, which is unconcealed in the works, is made understandable as the present situation of understanding.321

Such a long, and at times contradictory, quote requires some explanation, and I will do so with recourse to the student work below. Firstly however I want to take issue with Figal’s initial claims that hermeneutics is not a ‘practical’ or ‘useful’ philosophy. We have seen throughout the previous analyses the students involve themselves in extensive conversations about texts, listen attentively to each other as well as the text, play the ‘game’ of understanding, merge horizons with tact and understanding, and philosophise with thoughtfulness and reflectivity about a range of interests. These qualities and dispositions, all of which hermeneutics demands, strike me as amongst the most practical of all qualities the philosophical thinker can display, and calls into question Figal’s charge that hermeneutics is not practical. I understand here that he is drawing a very fine distinction between the hermeneutics as a theoretical discipline and philosophy as a concrete practice, but the distinction mitigates the actual and necessary effect that hermeneutical thinking has on thought and action. It is true that hermeneutics offers no direction as to how one can implement or practice its various axioms.

Hermeneutics, however, with its gaze directed at the good, with its belief in an ethics of conversation, and with its valorisation of phronesis as a model of thinking and being, must surely be recognised as the most practical of philosophies. Figal may well be recognising this when, in the above quotation, he finally conlates practical philosophy with play and understanding, which is what hermeneutics must always be.

In the analyses below, as they are a preliminary conclusion to this work as a whole, I will be reminding the reader of some of the hermeneutic practices already discussed. I will be concentrating though on two new characteristics—the event of understanding and phronesis. Together, they suggest that there is an intersubjective and historical quality to hermeneutics that must be acknowledged, in that understanding is a process that began before conversation with others, and is one that has no particular moment of conclusion. Together they also suggest that students leave the classroom not with a ‘product’ they can use such as a new concept or heuristic for application in a practical situation. Instead, they leave with an enlarged understanding of the world, themselves, and their horizon of experience, all of which has been developed through conversation with a tradition that they can both learn from and develop. This eventfulness, which ends in phronesis, is not a quality that can be measured or transferred from person to person, and it does not leave one with rules that can be applied to living the ‘good life’. I believe finally that these two qualities of phronesis and eventfulness again substantially distinguish my practice from the comparatively circumscribed Lipman approach.

In the discussion below, taken from Transcript 13, I begin with the specific recommendation to students that they reflect on any potential applications they may see in a text. This is something that I have discussed above but here I use as an example of Gadamer’s hermeneutically developed phronesis.

**Me**  Ok, so let's quickly remind ourselves what interpretation actually means then.

**Bella**  To have your own understanding of something.

**Me**  To have your own understanding of something. What do you mean by your own?

**Bella**  Your interpretation, your evidence and thoughts put together.

**Me**  Your own understanding of something. Ok, what do other people think?
At this early point I’m not entirely satisfied with Bella’s response as it has the potential to be too egotistical for proper hermeneutic agreement. I consequently ask for further illumination of the word.

Charlie  What you take out of something, and relate it to your life.
Me     Relate it to your life. Yes.
Zoe    Do you necessarily have to relate it to your life?
Charlie Well, relate it to some aspect of something that’s happened to you, that you’ve experienced.
Zoe    Why?
Charlie Well, because I don’t know what you’ve experienced, I can’t relate it to what you’ve done, in your life.
Zoe    No but, does interpretation, do you have to relate it, or can it just be your understanding of the book?
Charlie But that’s how you understand it.
Zoe    Through your own experience?
Charlie Yeah.
Jack   If you interpret a book about the holocaust, how would you link that to your life?
Zoe    Bad things.
Charlie From what you know about the holocaust. Or from other bad things? You could relate it to the first world war if you’ve read about that.
Jack   I’ve stubbed my toe, this is just like the holocaust?
Charlie Yeah, well I guess so, you could.

Note here that it is the students themselves who are clarifying the philosophical idea rather than me, whose contributions are minimal. They are, in doing so, clearly expressing the link between interpretation and lived experience—which they have come to understand through repeated involvement in hermeneutics and by discussions of its implications for practice. Jack also asks an interesting initial question that suggests (quite rightly I think) that there are boundaries to our ability to interpret. His ironic retort, ‘I’ve stubbed my toe,’ is not fully understood by Lucas, in that Jack recognises the limits of experience and language. Note however that, as in phronesis, there is no literal translation to experience, and that the relationship is symbiotic rather than one way; the text and experience inform each other, rather than the text being the guide to experience. A further example is below.
Me  You said impact on you. What is it about things that make them have an impact?
Jack  There could be something that could be applied to your own life, or something that you would remember most from the book.
Me  What would it be about something that makes it memorable?
Jack  The way it’s written. The way the characters act. What you think you would do in that situation better than them.
Me  Amelia, you want to say something.
Amelia  I was going to say it makes you realise something about the book, or about yourself, or about society.
Me  That’s quite different Amelia isn’t it, to what other people said.
Amelia  Ok.
Me  So keep going, that’s good. Interesting, everybody’s been interesting, talk more about that Amelia. It’s something that makes you realise something.
Amelia  Well, hang on a sec.
Me  You said about yourself, or about society.
Amelia  Well, at the end of the book I decided it [the killing of Lenny by George] was definitely the right thing to do, and it’s showing how deep Lenny and George’s friendship is… how much he cares for Lenny, because that’s the ultimate thing to do, kill his friend, when it’s the right thing to do. Even though it’s going to have huge impact and probably destroy his life, he’s thinking that I’ve done this and it’s still the right thing to do. For his friend.
Me  So what has that meant you’ve realised about yourself or society?
Amelia  Realised how deep friendship can go. But it could be anything, it could be racism or, could make someone see things differently.

In this example Amelia touches on the relationship between phronesis and self-knowledge, in that for her to able to reflect on a correct action she recognises that she must also reflect on herself as the agent of any action. Amelia gestures towards the incipient development of both by saying that ‘it makes you realise something… about yourself’ and she suggests that her thinking changed as she read the book. Amelia is also able to expand this recognition and reflect on her beliefs about other problematic situations in society. A further example of phronesis, in its ‘playful’ mode, can be found below as students work their way towards an understanding of the poem Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird in which the ‘eventful’ nature of the hermeneutic situation is revealed. Note the several qualities that students exhibit in this excerpt, taken from Transcript 19, and in particular the application of tradition...
to the concrete. This again highlights aspects of phronesis that Gadamer mandates as the correct orientation in hermeneutic work.

Charlie If you took the blackbird as a literal thing, and that it seems that it's not really noticed as much all throughout the poem. And maybe he's trying to say that you should open your eyes to the whole world so you can notice the small things.

Zoe Just looking at the poem in a literal sense with the blackbird actually being a blackbird, not necessarily specified as a crow or a raven or something... The first stanza makes me think that the blackbird is superior, like 'the only moving thing was the eye of the blackbird'... It makes me think there are these superior birds floating around...

Me Can we join what Charlie said and what Zoe said into a meaning?

Charlie What if the blackbird is like a higher being of sorts, and it's a bird taking a literal form and it's moving around to different places. Just watching human behaviour.

Liam It somehow reminds me of this idea of Jesus, God coming down through Jesus... It gives me this idea of a mysterious higher being coming, being on earth. Not that I believe it myself, but that's what it gives me the feeling that's what he's trying to say...

Me It wouldn't have to be a God or a being, it could be something else couldn't it, like knowledge.

Liam It could be anything. I think it's not just a blackbird. Put it that way.

Charlie Just a higher power of sorts.

Liam Yes, not higher being, higher power.

Zoe Well, there's one thing that even with the blackbird being literal or the blackbird being the unknown or being God, the one stanza that I do not understand is number nine where it says "When the blackbird flew out of sight, It marked the edge Of one of many circles." I'm just trying to think what the circles could be. I don't necessarily see them as the moon or planets or the sun, I see them in a metaphorical sense, but I'm not too sure what.

Olivia It could be like a limit to our understanding or something. Particularly if there's a higher power of sorts, then it would understand more than we do, and be able to leave it.

Liam It would be like the whole idea of Christopher Columbus sailing out into the new world... There's a famous quote, you can't discover anything new unless you lose sight of the shores behind you.

Me So it sounds like we're developing a shared, by no means singular meaning, but a reasonable worthwhile meaning about this sense of unknownness, or unknown knowledge or something like that. This is the shift I want to make. How can we use this poem in our own lives today? What does it tell us about our own lives today?
Along with Gadamer I believe that tradition tells us things, and that if used with care, and the right balance of hermeneutic dispositions, it can point us towards ‘the good,’ which is an idea I will examine in greater detail in the discussion below. This implies the belief that, from tradition, we can seek out ideas that reveal and illuminate our current situation. This is, of course, a potentially problematic claim if the right attention to critique and *phronesis* is not achieved, but clearly with my last question I am suggesting the possibility of this to my students. If we read the conversation below, one that was motivated by the students’ understanding of the poem, the students justify exactly this prospect.

*Me*  What question does it ask of our own lives today?

*Lily*  Well, the poem seems to be about questioning things, and mysteries and stuff. And if that’s what the blackbird maybe means, then the poem’s showing you that, especially in [verse] nine, if you stop questioning things, and wondering about mysteries, then you won’t get any further, and so the poem is saying the attitude to how you go about in life is important.

*Me*  Right. What do other people have to say about that? I really want to go with what Lily’s saying there.

*Liam*  I agree with it. I think it’s a really good idea. It connects back to a lot of things. That whole idea of having to question something, losing sight of something, to find out something you don’t... I think that’s a meaning that’s going to be relevant forever. Human minds yearn to find out something else. There’s got to be something else that drives us, I think.

*Me*  Is that a good yearning? Is that always a good yearning?

*Charlie*  What, this want for knowledge?

*Zoe*  Well, it depends, too much of a good thing can harm you. But then not enough of a good thing can also harm you. So you want to find a balance.

*Me*  Can you give us some examples of too much of a good thing?

*Zoe*  Too much knowledge. You can have knowledge, and yes you can still make mistakes, and you may not be smart, so you can still have knowledge without being smart. We have knowledge of chemicals, we have discovered how to make nuclear bombs, so that’s too much knowledge in that area, and-

*Olivia*  —it’s not enough knowledge. We didn’t understand what was going to happen. Well, it could be seen as either.

*Zoe*  Yes.

*Liam*  They created something which they didn’t know.

*Charlie*  I don’t think it’s too much knowledge I think it's-
Olivia

-Not enough understanding.

Charlie

Yes, what you do with that knowledge.

Although there is more to go in this conversation, at this point the students have made some thoughtful and considered observations about humans’ quest for knowledge, the difference between knowledge and understanding, and the effects of that knowledge when it is used unbounded by moral principles. In this they are demonstrating the secondary effect of *phronesis* in understanding—the understanding of concrete situations that falls out of the hermeneutic event.

The next example, taken from Transcript 19, lends weight to the possibilities of this claim, in that students are discussing an entirely different poem and exhibit considered reflections on their self-understanding, along with insight into lived experience and practical affairs. After some textual work on the poem *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London*[^322], Sophie and Amelia share their initial thoughts:

**Sophie**  It makes me think of the only two. No one intensely personal. Only two people I know have died and this makes me remember that. It was very strange because I was much younger when it happened as well so I didn’t really understand it. So it reminds me of that.

**Amelia**  A while ago we talked about... how death is the most personal time you have and I think it’s about achieving that level of being with yourself. Because you’re close to that, you’re close to the death. He’s talking about being in his own world, cause he’s so close to that, that’s the closest he’s getting to that level of personalness... It sounded good in my head.

[…]

**Me**  I know what you mean. I don’t think it’s a word but I know what you mean. What do other people think, in terms of what it [the poem] makes you think about?

**Sophie**  ...It makes me think of the bombing in London in the 1940s.

**Me**  That’s exactly what I thought about too Sophie. It was written around that time.

**Sophie**  ...It makes me think about how they bomb the water mains and stuff. When people hid underground and all those sorts of things. Of the writing 'After the first death, there is no other.' I also interpreted that as in war. You know when the first Australian soldier died in Afghanistan, or Iraq or wherever it was, and it was this huge deal. And the more

[^322]: See Appendix 9
people that die, the less it seems to matter. That is another meaning I took from the poem.

Here Sophie has made a movement from the traditional text to the particular, in that she is trying out the poem as it relates to her own situation. Lily continues with the idea below.

Lily Like what Sophie said before, the first death matters a lot and then the next few deaths aren’t as important, I think it’s questioning whether they are less important. It does make you think should you react the same way to them all, or should you just cope with it the first time, and then not have to go through the stress again.

Me Let’s answer that question.

Sophie Zoe said three things.

Me It’s not so unrelated to what you said. How should we respond to increasing numbers of deaths, which relates to what you said about we remember the first death in Afghanistan but we kind of forget after that don’t we.

Sophie They become less significant with more people dying.

Lily They’re kind of grouped together.

Sophie My example wasn’t exactly the best example.

Me I’m sorry Sophie, I’m going to have to disagree with you there, I think that’s a great example... Why do we tend to forget these things?

Lily Because, say you group them together, whereas when there’s just one person... you think about it, one person has died, and has all this sadness cause you think about how this one death must affect their family and everyone, and then when it’s a huge crisis... it’s terrible, you should do something, it’s a crisis, and it affects a lot of people, and you don’t think about the individual people who it affects most.

Sophie Like Amelia said. It becomes a number.

Me It becomes a number did you say?

- [various simultaneous contributions - untranscribable]

Sophie Although I remember what it was like, when the three thousandth American soldier died. That was a big deal, but once again it was the three thousandth soldier. He didn’t have a name.

Olivia It’s like Stalin said. One death is a tragedy, thousands are a statistic.

Me Say that again Olivia.

Olivia I can’t remember the exact quote, but Stalin said something along the lines of One death is a tragedy, thousands are a statistic. Because it’s beyond comprehension. You can’t understand what that means.

Me ...What’s this poem telling us though, in opposition to Stalin and Afghanistan and things like that..
Lily Do you mean in opposition as in doesn’t have anything to do with it or-
Me -No no no-
Lily -Yes, I think by saying after the death there is no other, that kind of comment on the way that we react to death, is meant to try and make you think about it, and consider how you would react.
Me Yes. And maybe not react in such a blasé-
Sophie -I think we’re still shocked, and we still find it very disconcerting when large amounts of people die or there are lots of deaths, but it becomes what is around you. Like for people in war torn countries, death is a part of life... In some cultures in those areas they don’t actually name their children until they’re two or three because of the fact there’s a chance that they won’t get older than that. It reminds me of that. For them death is a part of life and so it becomes less extreme and less heavy for the individual because you have to deal with it. And it becomes less of a huge thing in the media.

Together the students variously reflect on their own attitudes towards death, experienced both personally and through the media, and are enabled to do so by their utilisation of the text they read together. They are demonstrating at least a theoretical understanding of the situation, and are also developing their attitudes and awareness of their culture as it might respond differently, and indeed incorrectly, to death in wartime. In this, the students are interpreting the poem as it relates to their own understanding of the good, and of practical knowledge. Note as well that this is not a literal or rule-bound application of the text—but rather one that demonstrates aptly the hermeneutic quality of *phronesis* in interpretation. This quality is further demonstrated below.

Me Well, what do you think. Should we refuse to mourn people’s deaths? Do you agree with what he’s saying here?
Amelia I think that’s just how he’s dealing with it.
Lily I don’t think he’s saying we shouldn’t mourn.
Sophie There’s not one way of dealing with death. There’s no way you can prepare for death.
- [...] 
Me Amelia, what did you say?
Amelia I was just saying that he’s talking of ways to deal with death, and this is how he’s dealing with it.
Me So let’s not worry about-
Amelia -he’s dealing with it by trying to go over the point of dealing with it.
Me  Let’s not worry about Dylan now, let’s worry about ourselves. We should worry about him, I shouldn’t say that. Now that he’s spoken to us do we take on board what he’s said, or what do you think. Should we refuse to mourn?

Lily  I think it’s one option, going numb is just one of several reactions that people can have to death. He’s not saying that that’s the way that we should, it’s just expressing his own feelings.

Sophie  Yes, I think the whole poem is just him saying how he feels about it... it's not a method of mourning, it’s just this is how I feel.

Me  Ok, what can we take from this then? Can we take some advice from this at all? Do you accept what he’s saying in your own lives?

Sophie  Well, it’s got a feeling through it of it’s all right to feel extreme pain... there’s an acceptance of this kind of pain.

Me  So you yourself would agree with or disagree with?

Sophie  I’m not really quite sure what I'm saying. I had an idea and it didn’t come out right.

Me  Lily, you look like you were about to say something.

Lily  I wasn't really, but I'll say something. I think we can read it and think about how he’s reacted and we can think about how that kind of reaction to death compares to our own. I don’t think the poem is telling us how we should, and I think we can think about the lines of the poem and how some of the things that this person has felt, but I don’t think. Hmmm.

Me  So you don’t think you have to refuse to mourn just because he says?

Lily  Yes. Yes.

Here we read how readily the students rejected the implication behind my questions—that we should merely utilise the poem to our lives in a rigid manner according to the poet’s demands. Sophie says ‘it’s not a method’ in this regard, and Lily says ‘we can think about how that kind of reaction to death compares to our own’. The students evidence a keen understanding of the correct manner in which one should interpret a text; that it is a conversation, that it is a playing with meaning, that it is not a search for universal truths, and that the text and concrete situation inform each other. This is a manner contrary to any method and is precisely the quality of phronesis that Gadamer sees as central to the hermeneutic orientation. The conversation finishes with me asking a specific hermeneutic question in which students think about themselves in relation to the poem, not as a distinct psychological entity.

Me  So what does reading this poem tell you about yourself? What thoughts about yourself did it bring to the surface? I read something the other day which said understanding a text means understanding yourself.
Zoe How could anybody interpret a text then?

Sophie How would one understand themselves? That’s one of those age-old questions kind of things. No one ever truly understands human nature.

Me Is that right, what Sophie says, do you all think?

Lily I think we can understand parts of ourselves. We can have reasoning behind some of our actions and thoughts. But I don’t think we can understand everything about everything we think.

Sophie Yes, that’s what I meant.

Zoe I think that even if you think you understand something that you don’t fully understand it. Especially one’s self because… over time the things that you thought you understood change, so you never understand what you think you understand therefore you never fully understand yourself.

Me And you said something to that, did you Sophie?

Sophie That you can’t ever look at yourself objectively.

Me So what does that suggest to us about understanding a text?

Sophie That it’s limited.

Zoe That we’ll never understand it.

Me Sorry?

Sophie It’s limited. Your understanding of a text is limited and varied and is different person to person.

Olivia I don’t think that limits your understanding. In some ways it enhances it, but it just makes it different to your understanding of what the text originally meant.

Rather than answer my question directly, the students tangentially engage in insightful and philosophical discussion about some important hermeneutic ideas, the understanding of which has been developed over our months of interpretive work. They are able to acknowledge the initially limited self-understanding we have, and explore the implications that has for understanding texts and the world. Final examples of phronesis, as it is directed towards the world rather than the immediate hermeneutic event, are written as responses to the Icarus myth and some related ecphrastic poems:

...But there are morals to be learned and as long as it’s seen as an old story the lessons (of ‘truth’) won’t be told. I don’t believe the lessons are listen to what you are told, or to not take risks (both could be taken out of it) but that people should be more aware of life, and to consider and think about things in general. It’s not to make people avoid taking a chance, but rather not to be reckless. I think this message is more obvious in William Carlos Williams’ poem where people are oblivious to Icarus and are focused on their daily life. They’re not to blame, but they could have made a large difference had they had taken a second to notice.
Emily – Response to William Carlos Williams’s poetry.

The truth claim that I am making is that we don’t have control over how life turns out but we can appreciate the small things that make life worth living. It is my personal belief that there is nothing more beautiful than a simple landscape and love. My opinion is that people are so over stimulated that they have lost their basic sense of self and sense of love (and so are) creating a world that seems larger and scarier than it really is. If we just let ourselves feel: feel how our surroundings affect us and how we affect others we would feel connected to each other through love instead of through technology.

Sophie – Personal reflection.

These observations, as well as those further above, are rich in practical wisdom. They are both about the world and the way hermeneutics is practised, and are examples of phronesis. The students exhibited what I suggest are qualities of correct interpretation: an orientation towards ‘the good’ in human affairs, the putting into articulate language their own being, elements of practical wisdom in concrete situations, and the correct use of hermeneutic principles, all with very little moderation from myself. Finally, they demonstrate that they are astute philosophers, in that they can discuss both the technical details of the hermeneutic situation in which they are involved, and reflect on ‘the good’ and their own being with intelligence and insight. It is this conflation of qualities and occurrences that make up the event of hermeneutic understanding and phronesis.

Discussion

In a summative evaluation of these varied conversations I claim that the outcome of a hermeneutic event, if it takes place under particular circumstances, will be an exhibition, in word and action, of a form of practical know-how called phronesis, and that finally this is the product of understanding. Already we can see how tempered my claim is by my use of the word ‘particular’—but rather than reiterate what I mean by this word I ask the reader to recall the analyses that have taken place above. Each of them has contributed to the illumination of what can be described as the hermeneutic orientation: a consciousness of effective history; a respect for and critical attitude towards authority; a playfulness in textuality and discussion; a shared use of language; and a consideration of the ‘other’ (be that text or person) that ensures merging of horizons. In these analyses I have repeatedly demonstrated how my students have learned about, discussed, and exhibited each of these hermeneutic characteristics in their interpretive work. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not just to demonstrate how to do hermeneutics, but to offer an alternative to the P4C method of philosophising. In developing this alternative, the first feature that distinguishes the two programs is that
Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition [Gadamer’s italics], a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.\footnote{Gadamer, Truth and Method, 291.}

I have written repeatedly that a key difference between Lipman and hermeneutics lies in Lipman’s very different uses of the text and tradition, as well as his reliance on a productive method. A corollary of this is the idea of philosophical exchange as event rather than as product. For hermeneutics, ‘event’ refers to the ongoing transformational engagement and discussion itself, while for Lipman the ‘product’ is the concept that emerges from structured dialogue. I see the Lipman method as essentially ahistorical and concept-oriented, while hermeneutics is neither of these. Instead, hermeneutics rests on a deep engagement with tradition and presents not results, but practical wisdom, which because it is enacted and re-enacted, eludes propositional definition.

This idea of event is significant, and all those who write about hermeneutics repeatedly refer to it. When we think of synonyms, words such as ‘occasion,’ ‘happening’ or ‘experience’ come to mind. It is this last term that most aptly describes the hermeneutic event, though each of the former words lends some quality to the concept. If we further think of those occasions that we might refer to as events, we immediately dismiss the fleeting or insignificant experiences in our lives as those quickly forgotten. Instead, an ‘event’ has the feature of something formative and constructive that might develop our character or necessitate the re-evaluation of our beliefs. Further, typically implied in ‘event’ are other people or entities, and so an event is wider than one’s subjectivity. Lived experience already allows us an understanding of the word ‘event’ as something particularly significant when compared to the ephemeral. The conversations analysed above can reasonably be described as significant in a way that differentiates them from everyday conversations in classrooms. The hermeneutic event is something more than the reiteration of a text, or the undergoing of an experience, no matter how insightful (psychological or otherwise) that retelling may be. A philosophical claim, made with regard to nothing but one’s own subjective experience or consideration, cannot be considered eventful in Gadamerian terms. The use of language to explain one’s own thoughts in more exacting detail is not necessarily eventful, and neither is the demonstration of the wordiness one resorts to in order to do so. There are a number of qualities that make up the hermeneutic event, and while some of these have been mentioned previously in other contexts, as a summary of my analysis section I will concentrate on some
key aspects in the discussions above that illuminate particularly evident examples of the hermeneutic event.

Perhaps the most evident element in the hermeneutic event is its first principle of intersubjectivity. The Cartesian identity, as represented by the solitary reflective figure, is not a member of a linguistic community, and in fact works consciously to rid himself of all preceding beliefs. His first task is to reject all vestiges of history and the ‘other’ in order to renew himself afresh from a position free of prejudice. In contrast to this, Davey observes the following:

The event of understanding is not an individual achievement but presupposes an ethical encounter with an other. The event of understanding also depends upon... the hermeneutic community in which the subject participates and through which the subject is socialized.324

In this, the evidence for ethical participation by the students above is manifest in the way they listen attentively to each other, build on each others’ ideas, and approach the text with humility and openness. The hermeneutic community is one in which the possibility of an edifying experience is always the first motivation. Jack, when he says ‘[t]here could be something that could be applied to your own life, or something that you would remember most from the book,’ recognises this potential and then proceeds to do just that with his peers by testing the validity of the book’s claims. Lily is also thinking in an intersubjective way when she says ‘[l]ike what Sophie said before, the first death matters a lot and then the next few deaths aren’t as important, I think it’s questioning whether they are less important,’ and in doing so has explicitly recognised Sophie’s contribution and used it to develop her own understanding of the conversation’s theme. These examples are also each practically ethical in that the students recognise the worth of the other and work with them to emphasise and build on that worth, which is a first demonstration of phronesis.

The second and related quality of the hermeneutic event lies in its conversational orientation towards tradition. In this regard Gadamer writes that ‘...what constitutes the hermeneutical event proper is not language as language... it consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation.’325 It is this reworking of tradition that so distinguishes hermeneutics from P4C, and enables even adolescent students to do worthwhile philosophical work in conversation with some of the great minds that tradition has to offer. Gadamer emphasises that the hermeneutic thinker is not talking for the sake of it, nor reinventing the world from a subjective point, but taking part in the development of a shared history on which their pre-existing beliefs rest. That the students do this is evident where Charlie speculates that ‘[i]f you

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324 Davey, Unquiet Understanding : Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics, 9.
325 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 459.
took the blackbird as a literal thing... maybe he's trying to say that you should open your eyes to the whole world so you can notice the small things,’ and so adds to the interpretive canon that exists around the well-known poem. Note however that this is not mere appropriation of tradition, but a translation of the same into a contemporary sensibility. For this we can remember Sophie’s translation of Thomas’ poem about WWII where she says that ‘I also interpreted that as in war. You know when the first Australian soldier died in Afghanistan, or Iraq or wherever it was, and it was this huge deal.’ For her the poem resonates today with its message of mourning in another space and place despite its temporal distance.

The third element of a hermeneutic event is the particular use of language as it works to disclose the world and self. I have shown in my literature review the significance of Heidegger’s thought on Gadamer’s hermeneutics, but will reiterate his cardinal idea that ‘Dasein... is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.’ This demands that the thematisation and understanding of lived experience in the world is always at the forefront of hermeneutic thinking, and so must underpin any analytic and descriptive work. The utility of discussion is to put descriptions of being into language that can be understood by the speaker and, just as importantly, the language community of which the speaker is a part. Davey illuminates this further by writing that

Language for Gadamer is always more than what can be stated within it. Language is not merely a process of objectification: it has a generative and formative capacity. Philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with language as “event.” It reflects on what comes into being by means of language.

The event of language, then, is that experience or occurrence when, in conversation with another, an aspect of our own facticity reveals itself through words that had not occurred to us previously. This event has been enabled by the effective assistance given to us by tradition, along with the merged horizon generated in the hermeneutic community, and which acts to illuminate our own being. What Davey describes as ‘speculative manifestations’ or ‘ontic disclosures’ that ‘transcends our subjective being’ serve to offer us insight or unconceal our relations to the world of people and objects. To this end Zoe observes that ‘...over time the things that you thought you understood change, so you never understand what you think you understand therefore you never fully understand yourself,’ and in this she is making an astute observation about the possibility of self knowledge, its relationship to knowledge of the world, and the role that time plays in understanding. A further example comes from Amelia who

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326 Heidegger, Being and Time, 32.
327 Davey, Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics, 181.
328 Ibid., 25.
remembers that ‘[a] while ago we talked about... how death is the most personal time you have and I think it's about achieving that level of being with yourself. Because you're close to that, you're close to the death.’ In this statement she makes some equally revealing observations about her experience of grief and its affective impact. Both of these have emerged not subjectively nor spontaneously, but through attentiveness to the use of language as it discloses experience.

The fourth and final element of the hermeneutic event is its transformative nature. Again, recalling my initial exploration of the word ‘event’, I noted that such an experience would always have some impact on a person’s self-knowledge and understanding of the world. In recognising this I am suggesting as well that this impact will have the potential to manifest itself to some practical advantage in the subject’s affairs in the world, and I will discuss this further below. Suffice to say, for now, that the proper understanding of a text should have the ability to overturn incorrect prejudice, expand horizons and develop one’s intellectual and ethical understanding of the world. Davey agrees in writing that

Philosophical hermeneutics includes, then, as part of the event of understanding, the transformation of awareness and attitude that can occur as a result of engaging with a given subject matter. It is vital to grasping the way Bildung operates within philosophical hermeneutics that it too should be understood as... a formative process. 329

With the word Bildung we are firmly returned to Gadamer, who writes much about it in the early part of Truth and Method, and we are reminded of Rorty’s recommendation for philosophy that it be edifying rather than systematic. Both, in their non-foundational and aesthetic modes, saw in philosophy a way of reinventing the past with an eye to the future (Gadamer), and an opportunity to create new vocabularies with which to describe ourselves (Rorty). The similarities in both philosophers’ intentions are evident. A subject’s hermeneutic engagement does not enable her to describe phenomena and then leave things as they are, as it must leave her changed. Gadamer defines Bildung as ‘...more the process of becoming than the process itself [and] is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation.’ 330 He is also careful to separate it from the traditional sense of enculturation in the classics where they are seen as Truths to be absorbed. For him the transformative event is evidenced by the autonomous but effected participant in discussion who can demonstrate both the critical and the attuned understanding that comes from the proper hermeneutic orientation. Amelia, contrary to her initial thinking, relays that ‘...at the end of the book I decided it was definitely the right thing to do, and it's

329 Ibid., 39.
330 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 10.
showing how deep Lenny and George’s friendship is... Even though it’s going to have huge impact and probably destroy his life,’ and shows that she could now conceive of a situation where such drastic action might be ethically defensible. Lily, in another example of change, reflects that ‘...the first death matters a lot and then the next few deaths aren’t as important... It does make you think should you react the same way to them all, or should you just cope with it the first time, and then not have to go through the stress again.’ In the discussions above, as a series of observations and reflections from the students, it is apparent they have demonstrated that their thinking has shifted and that the experience of textual interpretation has enabled them to reinvent both the text and their own prejudice. In doing so they have amply reflected Gadamer’s signature observation of the hermeneutic event, that we ‘...arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.’ 331 The students in the above discussions are not left wondering what to believe, and their involvement reveals them to be mindful and present members of the classroom community.

I have deliberately left the subject of philosophy and phronesis to the end of this section, and indeed as the end of this thesis’s data analysis chapters, as I see it as the overall goal at which these efforts are directed, and so a fitting end to my empirical work. While Gadamer does not lack in themes or guiding ideas, many of which have already been discussed above, as yet I have not discussed in this chapter the concept of phronesis, which recurs throughout the hermeneutic theory inspired by Gadamer. For him, phronesis is that mode of thinking properly used by the hermeneutic thinker, and I have illuminated many instances of my students thinking in such a mode by applying their intelligence, sensitivity and experience to philosophical discussion. I will conclude by drawing together the practical wisdom my students demonstrated in everyday affairs, its relationship to ‘the good,’ and the possibility of truth in interpretation. The potential for a fifteen-year-old student displaying wisdom seems unlikely, as it is a quality also rare in adults, and I will not claim that anything my students say will be manifested in their actual decisions and behaviour in the world. However, the pondering of moral and practical problems is a worthwhile exercise, and has impacts on ethical development. Gadamer agrees in a tangential sense in writing ‘...it appears to me that heightened theoretic awareness about the experience of understanding and the practice of understanding, like philosophical hermeneutics and one’s own self-understanding, are inseparable [my italics].’ 332 While he is not discussing phronesis here, Gadamer is drawing a legitimate connection between theory and practice, which is not meant to be one of absolute causality in any case.

331 Ibid., 484.
332 “Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy.”

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In a contribution above Emily writes ‘I don’t believe the lessons are listen to what you are told, or to not take risks (both could be taken out of it) but that people should be more aware of life, and to consider and think about things in general. It’s not to make people avoid taking a chance, but rather to not be reckless.’ This strikes me as a statement rich in practical wisdom not only because it resists, in the first instance, a simplistic reading of the Icarus myth, but because it applies with thought and insight a better understanding of the myth to her everyday situation. For Bernstein, ‘...understanding, like phronesis, is a form of moral-practical knowledge which becomes constitutive of what we are in the process of becoming. What Gadamer seeks to show is that authentic hermeneutical understanding truly humanizes us...

Emily’s contribution is one amongst many that, as Bernstein suggests, winds together action-oriented beliefs about the world that reflect our distinctly human dilemmas and at the same time reflects our developing being-in and understanding-of the world. A practical philosophy, one that ‘truly humanizes us’, is not one that can be read from a rulebook or applied without discrimination to one’s affairs. Emily’s contribution is a powerful example of phronesis, as her application of the myth demonstrates a complicated and considered melding together of text, experience, and horizon that is ‘...not simply that which is useful to [her] in a particularly problematic situation [but rather] that which pertains to the self formation.’ In this example Emily’s work of interpretation and translation showed her to be a thinking agent whose thinking and self develops through the process of reflection and dialogue.

Ethical thought and phronesis have normative significance, and as yet I have not discussed much in the way of ‘the good’. Hermeneutics always has some sense of the good in mind as it sets about its work, and embedded in its practices are a set of ethical commitments about which I have variously discussed. Before I present an analysis of the students’ understanding of their ‘good’, Gadamer’s metaphor of the archer should be noted:

If one applies this comparison [of the archer’s target being the ‘good’] to practical philosophy, then one has to begin with the fact that the acting human being as the one who is who he is—in accord with his ethos—is guided by his practical reasonableness in making his concrete decisions, and he surely does not depend upon the guidance of a teacher.

One of my aims in a hermeneutic approach to P4C is to move students away from a problem-based target towards a more speculative and imaginative vision of philosophising. I do not believe that the Lipman approach allows for this re-envisioning of a future due to its narrow

334 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 161.
reliance on the immediate inquiring community, the absence of creative engagement with tradition, and the centrality of the Socratic figure. Imagination, and the development of ‘targets’, requires the inspiration of greater minds and works, and a more playful orientation towards discussion, than that available in the Lipman program. Part of this inspiration lies in the development of an individual (but not private or subjective) notion of the good. It is clearly the case that many students had some notion of what is correct in human affairs at the forefront of their thinking when interpreting texts. Sophie provides one of the best explicit examples of her personal ‘good’ in writing about the Icarus myth that ‘[i]t is my personal belief that there is nothing more beautiful than a simple landscape and love [and so] If we just let ourselves feel: feel how our surroundings affect us and how we affect others we would feel connected to each other through love instead of through technology.’ Sophie’s understanding of her idea of the good is clear, articulate, and I think might be generally thought to be a ‘good’ in itself, with its suspicion of technology, its emphasis on love and connection in human relations, and its recognition of the importance of beauty. Sophie’s image was not the result of me acting as a Socratic figure and guiding her to a correct conceptual definition, but rather it emerged from a rich interpretive discussion with tradition and by way of a uniquely developed understanding of the Icarus myth. Figal understands that, ‘[h]ermeneutics can accept the weight of the tradition of practical philosophy...when it develops the life of the whole in the understanding of tradition to such a degree that it may be called "good."’ It is clear from Sophie’s example that she is not engaging in a narrow and academic exercise in textual exegesis or critical analysis in her interpretation. She is, instead, enacting her being in a process that both draws on and develops her own understanding of the good as it presents itself to her through her own experience. This vision, that is both reflected in and generated by the tradition Sophie is interpreting, is a process without foundation, and is a powerful example of Heidegger’s ‘virtuous’ hermeneutic circle in action.

I now conclude this analysis with some brief and speculative implications for hermeneutics and truth. Gadamer’s opus is called Truth and Method, and one might well think he named it thus so as to make ironic reference to the impossibility of finding truth in either method or hermeneutics. He has very little to say about truth throughout, and noticeably resists offering any explicit truth criteria. Amongst the concluding paragraphs, however, he wrote, ‘[w]hat we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it. In understanding we

are drawn into an event of truth...’ It seems clear from this that Gadamer did see certain circumstances in which truth might emerge from a hermeneutic situation—but the conditions under which this truth might emerge supervene on an interpretive practice that is both rigorous but eludes a specific formalised practice. It is also difficult to ascribe a specific sense of the truth that may be found in ‘play,’ given its equally absent set of guidelines and its multifarious examples and manifestations. What is yet more difficult to grasp is the idea that truth may be experienced though an encounter with the ‘beautiful,’ given that he provides no criteria for what may be regarded as such. Nevertheless, Schmidt would regard these arguments against Gadamer as missing the point, in that they are still wedded to an idea of truth that falls out of method. He writes instead that

This experience [of the beautiful] legitimizes a prejudice for that particular linguistic horizon. This enlightening quality may be said to be the hermeneutic truth-criterion, since the examination of [various classical] arguments against a hermeneutic truth-criterion were seen not to apply to the enlightening.  

If we are to adjust our definition of truth so that it fits Gadamer’s conception, then of course it will be possible to claim the possibility of a hermeneutic truth in interpretation. To speak of ‘an enlightening’ for a ‘particular linguistic horizon’ as being truthful seems attractive, but at the same time is so circumscribed and relative that it reflects unsatisfactory criteria. If we look at claims that Zoe makes, for example that, ‘...even if you think you understand [eventually] over time the things that you thought you understood change, so you never understand what you think you understand therefore you never fully understand yourself,’ or ‘[y]ou can have knowledge, and yes you can still make mistakes, and you may not be smart, so you can still have knowledge without being smart,’ they seem insightful, accurate and indeed enlightened. She has been impressed by the wisdom contained in tradition, and worked into a viable maxim that may well be a true prejudice, or a piece of practical wisdom, that will serve her well in living. But calling this ‘truth’ would seem to contradict the very idea of phronesis, which acknowledges that there are no absolutes in human affairs, and that the wisest amongst us judges each situations astutely and without any universal commitments as such. At best, then, I think that what comes of hermeneutics is not truth as such, but theoretical and useful understandings that, if used judiciously, might help as to imagine and achieve the good we aspire to in our lives. This, in turn, is an aspiration that sufficiently addresses a worthwhile pragmatic intent.

337 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 484.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Hermeneutics and Pragmatism: A Fusion of Horizons

In my introduction I said that I considered this work to be a critique and development of the original Lipman P4C, rather than an unsympathetic analysis of a program that has been so influential in bringing philosophical thinking into primary and secondary school classrooms. It should be clear how enthusiastic I am about the value of such thinking for students, both in augmenting their ability to be thoughtful and reflective, and in developing their appreciation for literature. In concluding, I will touch on some of details of my empirical work and literature review, and provide the answers I have to the questions I presented in the introduction. I will also, by expanding on central themes that this work examines, address the broader question of a reconceptualisation of philosophical thinking for young people.

While I have demonstrated the particular influence of Dewey’s scientism on Lipman and P4C, what may not be necessarily supported is a single interpretation of a Dewey that had absolute faith in the rational methods of science, or that had an ahistorical and naturalised view of human existence that sees progress and experience in Darwinian terms. Certainly he can be interpreted in this way, and frequently has been, but if we allow a contemporary hermeneutic prejudice to fuse with Dewey in a more nuanced reading, I think that we can be reminded of his positive contributions to Lipman’s P4C, and refresh them at the same time. In this regard Jeannot writes the below:

Reading Dewey through the lens of Truth and Method, we can read past the misconceptions that pragmatism is hostile to tradition and traditionary authority and that it is a version of scientism that exalts “technique” above phronesis. Conversely, reading Gadamer through the lens of Art as Experience, we can read past the misconceptions that philosophical hermeneutics is a version of linguistic idealism, that Gadamer is a “closeted Hegelian” whose idea of a “fusion of horizons” is an apologetics for Absolute Spirit, and that he must be read as a political conservative despite his recurrent protests to the contrary.339

The observation that Dewey might be read as Jeannot suggests is not a ‘misconception’, as it is clear that such a common interpretation is reflected in many elements of Lipman’s well-reasoned and justified application of Dewey. There is a tendency towards method, an under-utilisation of tradition, and an emphasis on rationality and concept development at the expense of practicality in Lipman’s work, and Lipman’s interpretation significantly influenced those P4C advocates who then relied on his writings. I have shown however how Gadamer, and Rorty, can reorient and mitigate these tendencies, and Jeannot agrees as well that this is

possible. At the same time, while accusations that Gadamer is a conservative Hegelian are disproportionate, Dewey’s emphasis on democracy, the human subject’s life-world and the problems found in experience are bulwarks against any inclination towards excessive idealism.

In my initial approach to Dewey there is no doubt that I had been prejudiced in favour of a naturalistic reading of his philosophy, based on the large number of secondary works I had read when beginning this research that demanded such a reading. The instructive lesson of hermeneutics tells us, however, that understanding is always contingent, and so any interpretation is subject to the language of time and place, and its applicability in that time and place. I now find myself better able to accommodate aspects of Dewey’s work within a hermeneutic framework. This does not mean there is nothing still to criticise in Dewey and, consequently, Lipman’s P4C. My work is finally a fusion of the horizons of two traditions, where each is brought to listen to and critique the other, and from which an improved practice of philosophising emerges. The following will show how this new practice has developed from the theoretical discussions I have generated, and the empirical work I conducted with my students. It is structured in terms of the primary research question along with the three sub-questions I presented in my introduction. They are:

How does a hermeneutic critique of Philosophy for Children reconceptualise the philosophical practice of young people?

I. What are the philosophical and pedagogical elements immanent in P4C materials and practice?

II. What does a hermeneutic evaluation of these elements recommend for P4C?

III. What intellectual and personal qualities are developed in students and teachers in a Hermeneutics with Children?

I will briefly revisit the philosophical and pedagogical elements immanent in P4C’s ‘first wave,’ then evaluate these elements using Gadamer’s hermeneutics. I will then discuss the qualities developed in students and teachers in a Hermeneutics with Children (HwC), and finally justify HwC’s place as a distinct contribution to the P4C tradition.

The Philosophical and Pedagogical Elements Immanent in P4C

I have shown that there are specific elements in P4C materials that work towards endorsing a recognisable mode of philosophical instruction: one that is oriented towards concept development, that is methodical in nature, that sees the teacher as a traditional
Socratic figure who structures and guides student thinking towards an agreed conclusion, and that uses a range of artefacts as stimulus material in order to motivate questioning. I have also made explicit the connections between P4C and the philosophical heritage of both Socrates and the early American pragmatists. This hybrid influence sees philosophy as intrinsically connected to the problems of people in their environment, it looks to science for its model of problem-solving, to the concept as the repository of human knowledge, and to democracy as its ultimate target. My reading of this influence is not idiosyncratic or tendentious, and is supported by the many references I have made to others who have drawn similar conclusions.

To first understand, and then fuse, the philosophies of Dewey and Gadamer it is helpful to begin at their respective conceptions of experience, both of which were products of their own horizons. Dewey was understandably influenced by the rapid development of the modern world under the guidance of scientific progress, and saw the human subject in naturalistic terms. Gadamer, writing nearly fifty years later, sought to resist this same science’s deleterious effects on human understanding, and he re-envisioned the human subject as historically and linguistically formed. Therefore we have Dewey describing experience as:

...the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives. A man does something; he lifts let us say, a stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing... The process continues until a mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close.

While Gadamer reminds us that:

This structure of the hermeneutical experience, which so totally contradicts the idea of scientific methodology, itself depends on the character of language as event that we have described at length.

In these quotes we can see the distinction between Dewey’s ‘process’ and Gadamer’s ‘character of language’ as they relate to experience. I have described previously the hermeneutic event of experience and demonstrated how it manifests in student discussions. Its transformative, intersubjective, linguistic and tradition-oriented elements are substantially different from Dewey’s description of the ‘creature’ that systematically problem-solves in a world of objects. This Deweyan concept of experience is equally reflected in the P4C method of stimulus-solution philosophising, in which students find problems which are then resolved in the community of inquiry, with the artefact having been set aside once a question had been decided on. Lipman’s three modes of thinking: the creative, the caring and the critical, each

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341 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 459.
can be seen as efforts to manifest Deweyean pragmatism, and are reflected in their shared work on democracy, reason and method.

An explicit commitment in the philosophies of Lipman and Dewey is that of a democratically organised and functioning community. For Dewey, a democracy is ‘[a] society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life...’ and the reflection of this idea can be seen in P4C. In his community of inquiry, Lipman presents an ideal of ‘associated living’ where members are free to share and critique ideas so long as they are prepared to agree to the rules that are essential to rational dialogue that are imposed by the Socratic figure. The further influence on this conception of community comes from Peirce’s work on the scientific community, which Dewey recognised as being intrinsically critical and creative in nature, as well as democratic. This recognition is then revealed in Lipman’s commitment to the same, and so we regularly read in P4C materials commitments to the organisational idea of the CoI, which is set up so that its members are responsible for the development of ideas in a democratic setting.

Further to this, concept development is intrinsic to P4C, and even Gadamer agrees that ‘...concepts are really one of the distinguishing marks of philosophy, for philosophy first entered Western culture in this form.’ It is difficult to resist the notion that concepts have this significance, which is one that P4C embraces and defines itself by, but the practice and method of conceptual development is multifarious. Lipman, we remember from my literature review, sees concept development as ‘...organizing information into relational clusters and then analysing and clarifying them so as to expedite their employment in understanding and judging.’ This technical-rational method of concept development and use is designed to provide an infrastructure for understanding the world by which our human experiences are arranged. Such a mode of philosophising puts the concept first, in that it is the focus of conversation, so it might be defined in isolation from human experience, while then referring to such experience as evidence of its cogency. In this mode we have the concept as the object of discussion, which is reminiscent of the ancient Greek style of thinking where problems such as ‘virtue’ or ‘courage’ or ‘friendship’ are proffered for discussion. I have shown how much P4C is based on this model of inquiry, and how different hermeneutic philosophising is to this model. The success of P4C lies in a focus on the concept and the presence of a Socratic questioner, but these are elements that are absent from HwC. In their place is the text to be

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interpreted and the teacher who, rather than coordinate the direction of dialogue, maintains the flow of discussion, language and play that understanding requires.

For Lipman and Dewey, critique, and even truth, is possible through discursive means, which require the use of rational dialogue in resolving a problem suggested by the CoI. In acknowledging the scientific community as a paradigm of the ‘truthful’ inquiring community, Bleazby reminds us that, ‘Dewey argues that communal inquiry gives rise to common truths that integrate the understandings and interests of many people and are consequently more intersubjective and less individualistic,’ and that truth for Dewey is an idea or belief that allows us to meaningfully reconstruct experience. I have shown that for P4C there is a particular structure and technique to this rational dialogue, based on Socrates’ and the scientific community’s paradigms, and I problematised certain elements of its operation. Along with these models as his exemplars, Lipman also emphasised the importance of the intersubjective nature of critique and agreement. In this way there are some similarities between a hermeneutic and pragmatic approach to philosophising and so I agree with Davey (and Lipman) that

[T]he tendency of the will to method to remain circumscribed by its own presuppositions is at odds with the dialogical conviction of philosophical hermeneutics that the particularity and value of a given perspective only becomes apparent when it is both challenged and brought into community with others... The ethical preparedness to face the risks and challenges of dialogical encounter offers a better chance of sensing what those intricacies entail.

For HwC, as for P4C, at least at the meta-level, the emphasis is on the intersubjective exchange of ideas and beliefs. The details of these elements are different in some respects to HwC’s, and result in a different practice of philosophical thinking. For both however, the presence of others is central to critique.

A Hermeneutic Evaluation of P4C

In contrast to what may appear to be an apparent dichotomy between pragmatism and hermeneutics, and Dewey and Gadamer, Jeannot again warns that ‘[i]f one were inclined to read Dewey’s instrumentalism along scientistic lines... then it might come as something of a surprise, welcome or otherwise, that the starting point and disposition that motivates Art as Experience is substantially the same as Gadamer’s.’ Some of Dewey’s writings on art, in particular, are relevant to this work. In reading them we would find Dewey claiming that

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In common conception, the work of art is identified with the building, book, painting or statue in its existence apart from human experience. Since the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience, the result is not favourable to understanding.  

In reflecting on this first quote it is clear that Dewey can be read in a Gadamerian light, and that he believed the meaning of art was its function in the everyday—an idea that seems indistinguishable from Gadamer’s demand that the meaning of art is its application to the experience of humans. It is the case that P4C discusses various uses of art, but not in terms of application and understanding. We can also read, In Dewey, the same argument against the aestheticisation of art at the expense of utility that is found in Gadamer’s critique of Kantian aesthetics:

The one who sets out to theorize about the esthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our own homes and on our own streets.

This idea of ‘realizing in thought’ what the people of the time in which the Parthenon was created may have thought and believed, and engaging dialogically with those ideas, is clearly analogous to Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons,’ and again is an indication of the similarities between himself and Dewey. This is not how P4C presents the use of art, as it uses art only as a stimulus for questions. Dewey also observes that

...the live creature adopts its past; it can make friends with even its stupidities, using them as warnings that increase present wariness. Instead of trying to live upon whatever may have been achieved in the past, it uses past successes to inform the present.

It is this ‘use of the past’ and recognition of a tradition that provides us with ‘richness’ that seems most significant. Both Dewey and Gadamer believed that one could learn from our cultural past. While it is the case that P4C uses texts and other artefacts to initiate inquiry, there is never any discussion of their use as legitimate members of the Col, or as partners in conversation, or as a source of knowledge and wisdom. In P4C, while there is the presence of the artefact in the initial stages, it does not become the subject of discussion but rather becomes the stimulus for examining something else that is questionable. To my thinking, this minimal use of our artistic and cultural past is a deficiency as it overlooks the ability of tradition to inform the present and recreate the future. It means that Lipman’s P4C does not provide students with the historical perspective that enables them to critique prejudice, nor does it teach students how re-interpret that history, apply it to their everyday, and in doing so

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348 Dewey, Art as Experience, 3.
349 Ibid., 4.
350 Ibid., 18.
creatively invent new futures. The Lipman method, instead, makes philosophers that are atemporal problem solvers without this historical-critical facility. This is something that is in opposition to a hermeneutic interpretation of Dewey.

In Rorty, the pragmatist and admirer of Dewey, we also have a philosopher who believed that tradition and literature enables us to invent and reinvent ourselves. He wrote

A poeticized culture would be one which would not insist we find the real wall behind the painted ones, the real touchstones of truth as opposed to touchstones which are merely cultural artifacts. It would be a culture which, precisely by appreciating that all touchstones are such artifacts, would take as its goal the creation of ever more various and multicolored artifacts.  

Rorty, always critical of the foundationalism he attacks here, looked towards a post-philosophical world where the refreshed motive of thinkers was not ‘truth’ but the creation of ever-expanding and new vocabularies with which to describe ourselves and enrich experience. This is not an emphasis of the Lipman program, but it is an emphasis in HwC, with its constant imperative to re-interpret literary tradition and put into language these inventions. Perhaps then, seen through the lens of Gadamer, we can better understand Dewey’s claim that ‘[b]ecause experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ.’ In Lipman we have the problematic concept stimulated by the silenced artwork that takes no part in conversation. In hermeneutics we have the possibility of a refashioned future based on a fused and interpreted past, where young philosophers, redescribed in Dewey’s language as ‘art in germ,’ are prepared and able to do this work. In my work with students I demonstrated that they are indeed able to refashion tradition in creative ways, and we can see that there is an inherent creativity in hermeneutics that Lipman fails to account for in his method. Lipman frequently cites creativity as an element of P4C, but does not provide the tools or conceptual work in order for it to emerge in any way other than through good fortune or the already-present creative abilities of the students. As well, Lipman’s creativity is directed towards conceptual development, rather than the enlivening of experience.

If we are to have then a new, or fused, conception of philosophy that attends to these revealed similarities then it stands to reason that the way in which we go about organising our communities and facilitating their work should change. I do not intend to ‘straw man’ the Lipman program by simplistically reducing its method to a set of rigid steps—from stimulus to dialogue to concept. I accept that there are variations on this theme, but a theme it is and I

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351 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 53-54.
352 Dewey, Art as Experience, 19.
have shown that for P4C there is a recognisable technique of doing philosophy that can be traced to Dewey’s valorisation of scientific progress and its method. Rorty, conversely, suggests the below about this valorisation:

Granted that Dewey never stopped talking about “scientific method,” I submit he never had anything very useful to say about it... I shall stick by my claim that Dewey could have said everything he needed to say if he dropped the term “scientific method.” He could have gotten just as much leverage out of saying that we needed, in all areas of conduct, more of the courage and imagination which Bacon and Galileo shared... as well as more willingness to toss out old ideas that have not panned out.\(^{353}\)

If we do the same with Lipman’s P4C, and forgo the idea of there being a method to philosophy just as Rorty does, we can reinvigorate the P4C tradition and maintain a valuable program and pedagogy that is sustained by the change. I suggest that Lipman and his followers over-read Dewey and were not, as Rorty was, able to distinguish between the spirit of science and the necessity of method. I have shown that my criticism of P4C as method is shared by others, and my proposal is that HwC presents a substantially different manner of philosophising to that suggested in P4C literature. In hermeneutics the reliance on method is replaced by the ‘practice’ of philosophy—not rule bound but oriented towards interpretation and creativity. I refer then to Bingham’s description below in seeking for a philosophical spirit that is not methodical but hermeneutic:

Hermeneutic vitality—preserving one’s openness to the different—requires a willingness to remain immersed in the play of language and to remain vulnerable to its speculative turns and ruptures. It is not sustained by attempts to control, regulate, or methodize the use of language. This is not to denigrate the latter but to observe that the enthusiastic celebration of what propositional discourse can achieve in the realms of science and medicine should not blind us to esteeming the speculative vitality of language upon which the life of Bildung and individual insight depend.\(^{354}\)

Whilst I am looking to fuse the pragmatic and hermeneutic in this conclusion, is it still apparent that there are some irreconcilable differences. Rorty is not entirely correct in saying that we can simply put aside Dewey’s method and encounter a pragmatism renewed. His ‘courage and imagination of Bacon and Galileo’ above is not the same as Bingham’s ‘play of language’ and ‘turns and ruptures,’ which present a postmodern vision of philosophical thinking. Hermeneutics’ demand, that interpretation can never be reiteration, equally demands that the language and experience of people, in discussion with others, be constantly reworked to fit the ever-changing dynamics of a world in flux. Rorty observes that ‘...nobody should be taught a

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\(^{354}\) Bingham, ”The Hermeneutics of Educational Questioning,” 554.
methodical way of being inventive and imaginative.\textsuperscript{355} Gadamer’s conceptualises, and my empirical work demonstrates, that hermeneutics can meet this negative mandate by presenting a philosophising that cultivates character by developing a wisdom and creativity that defies method.

In Lipman, and Dewey, while the method of concept development is the marker of philosophy, there is no discussion of the importance of language as the revealer of being. Gadamer proposes that ‘[t]he subordination of the natural concept formation that occurs in language to the structure of logic, as taught by Aristotle and, following him, Thomas, thus has only a relative truth.’\textsuperscript{356} So while Dewey and Lipman might agree that the defined concept marks the intelligent being, Gadamer corrects this as well by suggesting that reliance on the concept simplifies the phenomenology of everyday life, as the language that describes experience is absent. This means that the concept can only give us a ‘relative truth,’ one that is relative only to other concepts. Gadamer is critical of the orientation in philosophy that turns towards generalisations in concepts, and I am similarly critical of the same tendency in P4C. I do not think that concept development in this mode is enfranchising for young people, that it makes sufficient use of their experience, or that it ‘unconceals’ or reveals being in such a way that is useful or transformative for students. A better understanding of experience requires more than the defined concept, and should demand of students more than the logical faculties that are required to work in this way. I cannot see either how concept development alone is useful in developing practical wisdom, or that it edifies students in the manner that Rorty and Gadamer demand of philosophy. Gadamer, in correcting this narrowness of vision, recommends that

\ldots we turn to the natural formation of concepts that takes place in language [in which] the general concept meant by the word is enriched by any given perception of a thing, so that what emerges is a new, more specific word formation which does more justice to the particularity of that act of perception.\textsuperscript{357}

There is the clear acknowledgement here of the importance of conceptual understanding, but for Gadamer the concept emerges from the experience and perception that is articulated through language, and built up over time and through successive experiences. The influence of phenomenology on Gadamer is apparent here, in that he does not talk of a logically defined concept, or a process of reasoning and refinement. He talks of a collation of perceptions that enrich and enliven an idea, and so make it vivid to the subject and useful in their lives. In my

\textsuperscript{355} Rorty, “Response to James Gouinlock,” 92.

\textsuperscript{356} Gadamer, Truth and Method, 427.

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid.
empirical work I have shown how this looks in practice, by initially and deliberately inhabiting a Socratic persona early on in the classroom, and by then shifting to a hermeneutic figure whose role was to keep the discussion going for long as practicable. In this way my students, through their collation of experiences shared with each other, and the layering of these shared perceptions for themselves, and by maintaining their philosophical gaze on the text and experience rather than the question and the concept, developed their understanding of the world as well as their understanding of concepts.

I agree as well with Gadamer that this has a secondary benefit. In placing the ‘word’ before the ‘concept’ in this way, but by emphasising the importance of thick description of experience rather than thin conceptual definitions, Gadamer observes that

Without bringing concepts to speak and without a common language, I believe we will not be able to find the words that can reach other persons. It is true that we usually move “from word to concept,” but we must also be able to move “from concept to word” if we wish to reach the other person. Only if we accomplish both will we gain a rational understanding of each other. 358

I take Gadamer’s meaning here to be that, in order to understand the other, we need to wrap around our concepts a vividness of language and expression that we can’t find in a dictionary definition of ‘justice’ or ‘happiness.’ We know that by reading the definition of these words we would still be ignorant of their operation in the world, and liable to misunderstandings in interpretation and practice, and that it is the collation of experience that surrounds these concepts that allows them utility. In my work with students there was never the imperative of concept development alone that motivated them to want to understand each other, and I demonstrated how intrinsic this motivation to understand was in hermeneutic practice. The understanding my students had of each other, implicit in how well they were able to work with each other’s ideas, anticipate thoughts, and enrich their interpretations of texts through their shared experience of language, is evidence enough that they did indeed ‘reach each other’ in a way that the method of concept development in Lipman’s P4C can not achieve.

Finally in this section, along with an emphasis on language, I present an alternative theory of critique. Hermeneutics is sometimes criticised for having no such theory, despite Gadamer’s frequent objections to the contrary, who saw the first task of hermeneutics as critique of prejudice. I argue that such criticisms do not account both for the possibility of critical thinking within hermeneutic practice, nor for the fact that those who proffer theories of critique are in fact already doing so under hermeneutic conditions, and are incorrectly absolving themselves of involvement in the hermeneutic circle.

358 “From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy,” 120.
The strength of hermeneutics in fact is the imperative of self-critique that lies in its recognition of prejudice as it shapes understanding. Gadamer thought that the best method of access to one’s own prejudices was to undertake interpretation of a text that was distanced from the self, so that prejudice can be revealed. This is another important use of the text as a critical other. It is certainly the case that in P4C this is an aspect of philosophical inquiry, but for hermeneutics the recognition of prejudice is the ongoing theme of any discussion. Hermeneutics, with its ontology of Dasein based on the work of Heidegger, sees humans as interpreters shaped by prejudice and language, rather than as Dewey’s organic problem solvers, and this ontological distinction marks itself on the differing philosophical systems. Prejudice then is the focus of hermeneutics, which in turn requires a particular type of critique:

Since [hermeneutic] conditions must be met in order to avoid a naive self-confirmation of the interpreter’s inherited beliefs, this openness for self-critique, the most difficult type of critique, lies at the heart of philosophical hermeneutics.\(^\text{359}\)

In hermeneutics, it is naive to consider any claim to understanding without attempting, as best as possible, to draw out the sets of beliefs that shape that understanding. My empirical work showed the manner in which I highlighted and returned to this idea repeatedly, and the manner in which students were able to reflect on their history and culture in order to bring it into relief when interpreting texts. In addition to this, students were able to articulate with clarity those moments when they were convinced, through conversation with others, that their beliefs needed reworking in the light of their hermeneutic experience. As well, in terms of using a theory of critique as such, hermeneutics clearly accounts for these possibilities. Gadamer allows for theories of critique as they shape prejudice in a productive way, and he accounts for them through the operation of the hermeneutic circle. Again I have shown the manner I which I demonstrated the ability of students to astutely draw on feminist theory in criticising elements of the texts they read.

Hermeneutics is also frequently accused of relativism due to its circularity, anti-foundationalism, and difficulties with the possibility of Truth. I argue however that HwC is in fact less relativistic than P4C, and that this is because of its conceptualisation of the other as tradition and ‘the things themselves’. Daniel and Auriac argue that, ‘[t]he CI [community of inquiry] is a micro-society in which pupils are initiated into the ethics of social life...’\(^\text{360}\) but in doing so point to precisely the problem that P4C has always had in its understanding of


\(^{360}\) Daniel and Auriac, "Philosophy, Critical Thinking and Philosophy for Children," 422.
community. The fact that P4C dialogues do take place in these ‘micro-communities’ renders them liable to the risk of relativising their truth claims or conclusions. Accusations of relativism are directed at those situations in which the claims of others are either ignored entirely, or are uncritically accepted as equally valid. The small scope of one classroom’s philosophical discussion is open to criticisms of both varieties given its scope of community is so narrow, and does not reach outside or beyond its own members.

By contrast, the strength of hermeneutics is that it can counter such accusations of relativism. There is always the presence of tradition and the text, which is included as a member of the discussion, and this acts as a defence against the relativising tendencies of the ‘micro-community’. Schmidt observes that ‘[o]ur effort is to listen to the Sache selbst, to open ourselves to the uncovering of being, that is, the way things are.’ He is correct in saying that the presence of these matters, in the form of tradition, acts as an extra-classroom interlocutor and critical element in the interpretive discussions that take place. The hermeneutic situation takes place, in this sense, in a macro, rather than micro, community. We recall as well that part of hermeneutic practice requires us to strengthen the argument of texts, so that we might understand them more comprehensively. Gadamer, as well, said ‘I am convinced of the fact that, quite simply, we need to learn from the classics...’ not in a dogmatic iterative way, but in a critical-conversational way that allows these classics to project themselves into the discussion so that they might moderate against a group’s relativising tendencies. In short, the more voices that can be heard in a discussion, the less relativistic and more critical that discussion’s content will be. Hermeneutics offers something that P4C does not have, namely the role of tradition as a critical other in interpretation and discussion.

The Development of Intellectual and Personal Qualities in HwC

Early on in this research I drew attention to some of the problems inherent in the CoI’s organisational paradigm, particularly the silences that surrounded a teacher’s use of power through questioning and rule-making, as well as P4C’s unproblematic attitude towards this power, and I have shown how this can be dealt with in hermeneutic practice. We have all seen that it is easy to live in ignorance, and disregard those in our communities, despite living in the same democratic space. Dewey’s democratic ideal has not brought with it the equality and respect amongst peoples he would have hoped for, and this same hope for Lipman can also be challenged in his CoI. Dewey and Lipman’s writings on democracy do not contain a convincing mode of communicative or intersubjective theorising that extends much beyond assertions of

362 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 537.
their ideal, and that disregard for others should be overcome. Here I draw on Burgh and Yorshansky who argue that

...the assumptions underlying the view of community of inquiry as a democratic practice present some practical as well as theoretical difficulties [and that] deliberation, as an essential social element of the democratic process, needs to be given priority.363

I agree with their claim that openness and mutual respect are key in teaching students how to philosophise, and that to achieve Dewey’s goal of associated living we must be able to ‘deliberate,’ with its suggestions of weighing up evidence and making good decisions in a social milieu. My greater ambitions though for the philosophy/democracy nexus are not for an associated existence, or a deliberative society, but for involved living to emerge, with its suggestions of mutual care and concern. I argue that involved living aligns with Rorty’s solidarity and Gadamer’s fusion of horizons. I do not think that by ironing out problems of power alone, which is what Burgh and Yorshnasky (amongst others) go on to suggest, we become more cognitively astute, or wiser, or more caring in our decisions. It will help us get to know our fellow humans better, and have more concern for their well-being, if we equalise everybody’s right to speak, but understanding people is another step along the path. To achieve this requires a type of creative and empathetic thinking that, as Rorty says, the poets inspire in us, rather than the critical theorists or the scientific communities.

Lipman came late to the realisation that his initial model of rational inquiry lacked the necessary intersubjective element required to make students care about what others thought or felt. Traverso, a theorist who is one of the very few I have been able to identify as seeing the hermeneutic potential in P4C, recognised Lipman’s efforts to move away from traditional ideas of rationality. In the second edition of Lipman’s Thinking in Education this shift is evident in the introduction, where Lipman indicates he has added caring thinking to the critical and creative thinking of the first edition.364 Traverso finds potential for P4C in this shift:

We feel that the proposition of Lipman [caring thinking] points to the development of a rationality removed from the purely instrumental sphere, which will also be referred to as hermeneutic rationality. That is, a rationality that is developed through dialogue and interpretation, and which at the same time integrates ethical elements into the hermeneutic process.365

Instrumental reasoning is not a sufficiently adequate tool to assist people or communities in making practical decisions or guiding ethical behaviours, let alone to develop understanding.

363 Lipman, Thinking in Education, 5-6.
While it would hardly be fair to describe the Lipman program as having encouraged a belief in the universal appropriateness of instrumental reasoning, his attempt to retrofit P4C was still too weighed down with Deweyan method and democracy to generate the shift in community philosophising that hermeneutics can provide. It was not enough for him to belatedly add caring thinking to his model of philosophising once it had already established its methodical roots elsewhere. So while Lipman sought to add to his program a type of intersubjective and sensitive thinking, Traverso, I think too readily and simplistically, calls Lipman’s caring thinking ‘hermeneutic’ without a substantial concept of what hermeneutics demands.

My argument here is that the hermeneutic community does not require an imposed orientation towards democracy, or an infrastructure of rules, or even a separate critique of power, as each of these elements are embedded within the practice of philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic event, which I have theorised and demonstrated empirically, is more than democratic because it generates a solidarity that surpasses Dewey’s and Lipman’s vision of democracy as associated living. Gadamer and Rorty describe it as below:

Genuine conversation transforms the viewpoint of both... The commonality between the partners is so very strong that the point is no longer the fact that I think this and you think that, but rather it involves the shared interpretation of the world which makes moral and social solidarity possible. What is right and is recognized as right by both sides requires by its very nature the commonality that is built up when human beings understand each other.366

In my utopia, human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized... but, rather, as a goal to be achieved. It is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created.367

We have with Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Rorty’s pragmatism similar goals for philosophy and thinking. Gadamer and Rorty both saw in their programs the importance of imagination and understanding as a philosophical practices. Both believe that the solidarity of a community of speakers is not created by critical-reflective inquiry (as for Lipman) but by interpreting the world using agreed terms and creating a shared vision of the world in a language with which all partners in the hermeneutic situation can agree. This theorising of solidarity, and the language event that is required to bring about solidarity, exceeds both in detail and ambition the concept development and community rationality presented by P4C as philosophical method. With HwC, I present instead a practice that formulates a comprehensively realised theory of communication and language event that generates an understanding of text and the other from which human solidarity, as its goal, emerges.

367 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, xiv.
With understanding as the purpose, and solidarity as the ‘good’ at which to aim, we are again reminded of the problem of the manner by which these goals might be achieved. We have seen that understanding is not achieved by the application of method to human experience, and that inquiry into concepts is an insufficiently creative and poetic path towards understanding the other. Method and concept development is what P4C recommends, and what HwC critiques, and I have shown that hermeneutics can ameliorate some of the former’s problems. My final claim in this section for HwC is that it demands and so enacts the form of practical wisdom I have previously identified as Aristotle’s *phronesis*. This means that philosophical thinking becomes a *practice* that young people and their teachers learn through the activity of interpreting texts. In identifying HwC as a qualitatively rich practice I agree with Davey that

The notion of a practice demands that its disciples be *methodical and disciplined* in their chosen approach... *Knowing when a decisive judgment is demanded is the mark of a skilled practitioner. Yet such judgment is not a matter of deploying methods or rules.*

While I have avoided the use of ‘method’ in relation to hermeneutics up until this point, it is the case that one can be *methodical* in the way that its practice is enacted, with all of the tacit and acquired judgements that are required in order to bring about understanding. In contrast to the many P4C materials for teachers that provide lists of classroom rules, Socratic questions, and books that have worked for classes in particular situations, I believe that particular personal qualities, along with some knowledge, must be developed in a hermeneutic approach to philosophical thinking, and that the quality of *phronesis* is the most important of these. I have explained the quality of *phronesis* and how it is developed in, and empirically demonstrated by, my students. It is the case that wisdom and judgement are qualities that have been infrequently mentioned in P4C materials, but again they are insufficiently theorised and described. In my explicit demand that teachers and students exhibit *phronesis*, I add another pedagogical and personal quality to P4C’s field of practice.

Gadamer occasionally illuminated his thinking concerning educational issues. We can already imagine that he would not favour the teacher who would deliver pre-interpreted readings of text, or who would not engage in authentic discussion and questioning with her students. His ideal teacher would work with ideas and matters that were relevant to their everyday being, and encourage them to construct their own understanding of materials. In this image we can readily identify elements of Dewey’s and Lipman’s ideal teacher as well. As

might be expected, Gadamer looked to Aristotle, and the best virtues of humans, to develop his pedagogical ideal:

... the fact that reward and punishment, praise and blame, exemplar and imitation, along with the ground of solidarity, sympathy, and love upon which their effect depends, that all these still form the "ethos" [character and values] of humankind prior to all appeals to reason and thus make such appeals possible in the first place: this is the heart of Aristotle's ethics...  

In recognising these qualities of a good teacher he is acknowledging that one cannot sufficiently categorise the type of person who might have all those virtues best suited to hermeneutic work as a teacher. These are much the same that might be encouraged in students as they become adept at understanding texts and each other, and it stands to reason that a teacher should posses some of what she hopes to see in her students. Dewey, in contrast to this, writes, '[t]he method of science engrained through education in habit means emancipation from rule of thumb and from the routine generated by rule of thumb procedure.' For phronesis however it is exactly those rules of thumb that are the beginning of wisdom, aligned with the knowledge that they might never be precisely applicable in the practical situation, and will need to be adjusted as experience demands. Again then we can see a critical difference between the Deweyan and Gadamerian understanding of experience and action.

The teachers and students who exhibit phronesis, in some or all of the ways described, have achieved more than the demands contained in a performance review, or a curriculum, or a test. HwC, as practice rather than method, emphasises and reveals the better virtues in teaching as "...it is inside practices that we learn some of our most substantive lessons about what is good, admirable, and meaningful." If we look at the personal qualities my students demonstrated, and I hope even I did as their teacher, we can see a studious group of people engaged in substantive discussion in which care, intellectual rigour and creativity were on display. And finally, in developing the ability to understand, they have achieved something equally important. Socrates tells us to ‘know thyself,’ so that we can be reminded of our own ignorance and be strong in character. Gadamer reminds us though that ‘...this self-understanding is always realized only in the understanding of a subject matter...’ and so it is the case that we need such matters, along with the complex faculty of interpretation, in order to achieve Socrates’ goal. Hermeneutics, as an exemplary teacher of phronesis, indeed allows

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us to ‘know ourselves,’ but just as importantly it also requires us to know the other. Socrates might have added this as an equally important maxim, as by achieving this we are a step closer towards attaining the solidarity with people that supports our democratic aspirations.

**Finally: A Reconceptualisation of Young People’s Philosophical Practice**

The criticisms above of the Lipman P4C program can finally be thematised around a few central ideas that bind together a hermeneutic approach to philosophising with children, and so give it a specific identity. While I have deliberately sought to find the unities and fusions between HwC and P4C, it remains the case that the two are in some ways irreconcilably different. Despite this, I believe that many who might call themselves advocates of P4C would at the same time, and in some ways, embrace some of the practices I have outlined above. In large part this is because, as I have shown, Dewey can be interpreted in such a way that the sympathies between himself and Gadamer can at times be striking. It might also be because the Lipman program is recognisably in need of refurbishment: one that retains its commitment to the idea that young people can and should think philosophically, while embracing postmodern ideas such as contingencies of truth, the construction of subjectivities through language, and the pastiche of pasts, presents and futures. Gadamer’s hermeneutics ably accounts for these contemporary positions, and in some ways can even be said to have anticipated them, given the year (1960) in which *Truth and Method* was published. Lipman’s program cannot be said to do so as readily, and remains fixed by a traditional interpretation of Dewey that cannot see his contemporary relevance in the way that a Rorty can.

The break I have made with Lipman, while so dependent on Gadamer, can in fact be more accurately traced to the seminal hermeneutics done by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, and the value Gadamer extracted from this work during his early development as a philosopher. Gadamer observed that “[t]he point of Heidegger’s hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance.”[373] It is this key recognition of the hermeneutic circle, as it describes human understanding, that shapes the philosophical differences between Dewey and Gadamer, and this recognition also reflects the differences between P4C and HwC. In hermeneutics we take the hermeneutic circle as an *ontological fact* of human being. We consequently recognise that this being is always already shaped by history and language, that its existential purpose is oriented towards the ongoing interpretation of the world, and that its actions are the enacting of these interpretations. We understand that philosophising must be more than methodical problem-solving, that self-reflection must rest on more than seeing

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ourselves as entities in the natural world, and that the critical influence of the other is historical and textual and can be found in a tradition that is still be useful to us. Heidegger’s ontologically significant distinction between humans and other entities was that it is only humans that are concerned with their own being, and that we are enclosed in a language and history that we must grapple with in our everyday dealings with the world.

A reconceptualisation of P4C means enlarging on these ideas and developing a philosophical practice that allows them to flourish, and that teaches students to recognise their particular abilities to think, and to be, in this way. In P4C there is insufficient discussion of the use of our cultural history as a legitimate member of the philosophical community, or as a partner in discussion, or as a source of knowledge and wisdom. I claim that this is a critical absence, and one that overlooks the ability of tradition to both inform and reinvent ourselves. Tradition does not oppress or overpower us if used wisely, and when done so it can help us to be substantially more creative in imagining our futures. Equally, P4C does not provide students with the historical perspective that enables them to recognise their own prejudice and critique their ideas in conversation with the great works and minds of tradition. In hermeneutics, the sense of community is expanded beyond the classroom doors and into a historical past that proves a greater critical check against relativism than Lipman’s Socratic figure can in the classroom. Always present are ‘the matters themselves’ that hold our philosophical attention and demand our well-reasoned accounts. And to close, HwC, in recognising the hermeneutic circularity of our existence, and the impossibility of escaping it in order to find solid ground, does away with any epistemological claims or method that might be used to establish the Truth of our existence. Instead it looks to the experience of tradition and the play of language as its practice of unconcealment. In this way hermeneutics, and so HwC, valorises the distinct ability of us all to recognise our prejudices, interpret our world, and understand it in human terms. We achieve this not alone, but together, in an ongoing discussion that recognises others and the vital role in which they have made us all.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Dialogue and The Question

Dialogue and The Question

The art of questioning is not the art of resisting the pressure of opinion; it already presupposes this freedom... The art of dialectic is not the art of being able to win every argument. On the contrary, it is possible that someone practicing the art of dialectic-i.e., the art of questioning and of seeking truth -comes off worse in the argument in the eyes of those listening to it. As the art of asking questions, dialectic proves its value because only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further-i.e., the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting a real dialogue.374

374 Ibid., 484.
Appendix 2: Sailing to Byzantium by W.B. Yeats

I
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another’s arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III
O sages standing in God’s holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV
Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.375

Appendix 3: Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird by Wallace Stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the black bird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.
VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.  

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Appendix 4: Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Two migrant workers, George and Lennie, have been let off a bus miles away from the California farm where they are due to start work. George is a small, dark man with “sharp, strong features.” Lennie, his companion, is his opposite, a giant of a man with a “shapeless” face. Overcome with thirst, the two stop in a clearing by a pool and decide to camp for the night. As the two converse, it becomes clear that Lennie has a mild mental disability, and is deeply devoted to George and dependent upon him for protection and guidance. George finds that Lennie, who loves petting soft things but often accidentally kills them, has been carrying and stroking a dead mouse. George angrily throws it away, fearing that Lennie might catch a disease from the dead animal. George complains loudly that his life would be easier without having to care for Lennie, but the reader senses that their friendship and devotion is mutual. He and Lennie share a dream of buying their own piece of land, farming it, and, much to Lennie’s delight, keeping rabbits. George ends the night by treating Lennie to the story he often tells him about what life will be like in such an idyllic place.

The next day, the men report to the nearby ranch. George, fearing how the boss will react to Lennie, insists that he’ll do all the talking. He lies, explaining that they travel together because they are cousins and that a horse kicked Lennie in the head when he was a child. They are hired. They meet Candy, an old “swamper,” or handyman, with a missing hand and an ancient dog, and Curley, the boss’s mean-spirited son. Curley is newly married, possessive of his flirtatious wife, and full of jealous suspicion. Once George and Lennie are alone in the bunkhouse, Curley’s wife appears and flirts with them. Lennie thinks she is “purty,” but George, sensing the trouble that could come from tangling with this woman and her husband, warns Lennie to stay away from her. Soon, the ranch-hands return from the fields for lunch, and George and Lennie meet Slim, the skilled mule driver who wields great authority on the ranch. Slim comments on the rarity of friendship like that between George and Lennie. Carlson, another ranch-hand, suggests that since Slim’s dog has just given birth, they should offer a puppy to Candy and shoot Candy’s old, good-for-nothing dog.

The next day, George confides in Slim that he and Lennie are not cousins, but have been friends since childhood. He tells how Lennie has often gotten them into trouble. For instance, they were forced to flee their last job because Lennie tried to touch a woman’s dress and was accused of rape. Slim agrees to give Lennie one of his puppies, and Carlson continues to badger Candy to kill his old dog. When Slim agrees with Carlson, saying that death would be a welcome relief to the suffering animal, Candy gives in. Carlson, before leading the dog outside, promises to do the job painlessly.

Slim goes to the barn to do some work, and Curley, who is maniacally searching for his wife, heads to the barn to accost Slim. Candy overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans to buy land, and offers his life’s savings if they will let him live there too. The three make a pact to let no one else know of their plan. Slim returns to the bunkhouse, berating Curley for his suspicions. Curley, searching for an easy target for his anger, finds Lennie and picks a fight with him. Lennie crushes Curley’s hand in the altercation. Slim warns Curley that if he tries to get George and Lennie fired, he will be the laughingstock of the farm.

The next night, most of the men go to the local brothel. Lennie is left with Crooks, the lonely, black stable-hand, and Candy. Curley’s wife flirts with them, refusing to leave until the other men come home. She notices the cuts on Lennie’s face and suspects that he, and not a piece of machinery as Curley claimed, is responsible for hurting her husband. This thought amuses her. The next day, Lennie accidentally kills his puppy in the barn. Curley’s wife enters and consoles him. She admits that life with Curley is a disappointment, and wishes that she had
followed her dream of becoming a movie star. Lennie tells her that he loves petting soft things, and she offers to let him feel her hair. When he grabs too tightly, she cries out. In his attempt to silence her, he accidentally breaks her neck.

Lennie flees back to a pool of the Salinas River that George had designated as a meeting place should either of them get into trouble. As the men back at the ranch discover what has happened and gather together a lynch party, George joins Lennie. Much to Lennie’s surprise, George is not mad at him for doing “a bad thing.” George begins to tell Lennie the story of the farm they will have together. As he describes the rabbits that Lennie will tend, the sound of the approaching lynch party grows louder. George shoots his friend in the back of the head. When the other men arrive, George lets them believe that Lennie had the gun, and George wrestled it away from him and shot him. Only Slim understands what has really happened, that George has killed his friend out of mercy. Slim consolingly leads him away, and the other men, completely puzzled, watch.  

Appendix 5: Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

The news that a wealthy young gentleman named Charles Bingley has rented the manor of Netherfield Park causes a great stir in the nearby village of Longbourn, especially in the Bennet household. The Bennets have five unmarried daughters—from oldest to youngest, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia—and Mrs. Bennet is desperate to see them all married. After Mr. Bennet pays a social visit to Mr. Bingley, the Bennets attend a ball at which Mr. Bingley is present. He is taken with Jane and spends much of the evening dancing with her. His close friend, Mr. Darcy, is less pleased with the evening and haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth, which makes everyone view him as arrogant and obnoxious.

At social functions over subsequent weeks, however, Mr. Darcy finds himself increasingly attracted to Elizabeth’s charm and intelligence. Jane’s friendship with Mr. Bingley also continues to burgeon, and Jane pays a visit to the Bingley mansion. On her journey to the house she is caught in a downpour and catches ill, forcing her to stay at Netherfield for several days. In order to tend to Jane, Elizabeth hikes through muddy fields and arrives with a spattered dress, much to the disdain of the snobbish Miss Bingley, Charles Bingley’s sister. Miss Bingley’s spite only increases when she notices that Darcy, whom she is pursuing, pays quite a bit of attention to Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth and Jane return home, they find Mr. Collins visiting their household. Mr. Collins is a young clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet’s property, which has been “entailed,” meaning that it can only be passed down to male heirs. Mr. Collins is a pompous fool, though he is quite enthralled by the Bennet girls. Shortly after his arrival, he makes a proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. She turns him down, wounding his pride. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls have become friendly with militia officers stationed in a nearby town. Among them is Wickham, a handsome young soldier who is friendly toward Elizabeth and tells her how Darcy cruelly cheated him out of an inheritance.

At the beginning of winter, the Bingleys and Darcy leave Netherfield and return to London, much to Jane’s dismay. A further shock arrives with the news that Mr. Collins has become engaged to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth’s best friend and the poor daughter of a local knight. Charlotte explains to Elizabeth that she is getting older and needs the match for financial reasons. Charlotte and Mr. Collins get married and Elizabeth promises to visit them at their new home. As winter progresses, Jane visits the city to see friends (hoping also that she might see Mr. Bingley). However, Miss Bingley visits her and behaves rudely, while Mr. Bingley fails to visit her at all. The marriage prospects for the Bennet girls appear bleak.

That spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte, who now lives near the home of Mr. Collins’s patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is also Darcy’s aunt. Darcy calls on Lady Catherine and encounters Elizabeth, whose presence leads him to make a number of visits to the Collins’s home, where she is staying. One day, he makes a shocking proposal of marriage, which Elizabeth quickly refuses. She tells Darcy that she considers him arrogant and unpleasant, then scolds him for steering Bingley away from Jane and disinheriting Wickham. Darcy leaves her but shortly thereafter delivers a letter to her. In this letter, he admits that he urged Bingley to distance himself from Jane, but claims he did so only because he thought their romance was not serious. As for Wickham, he informs Elizabeth that the young officer is a liar and that the real cause of their disagreement was Wickham’s attempt to elope with his young sister, Georgiana Darcy.

This letter causes Elizabeth to reevaluate her feelings about Darcy. She returns home and acts coldly toward Wickham. The militia is leaving town, which makes the younger, rather man-
crazy Bennet girls distraught. Lydia manages to obtain permission from her father to spend the summer with an old colonel in Brighton, where Wickham’s regiment will be stationed. With the arrival of June, Elizabeth goes on another journey, this time with the Gardiners, who are relatives of the Bennets. The trip takes her to the North and eventually to the neighborhood of Pemberley, Darcy’s estate. She visits Pemberley, after making sure that Darcy is away, and delights in the building and grounds, while hearing from Darcy’s servants that he is a wonderful, generous master. Suddenly, Darcy arrives and behaves cordially toward her. Making no mention of his proposal, he entertains the Gardiners and invites Elizabeth to meet his sister.

Shortly thereafter, however, a letter arrives from home, telling Elizabeth that Lydia has eloped with Wickham and that the couple is nowhere to be found, which suggests that they may be living together out of wedlock. Fearful of the disgrace such a situation would bring on her entire family, Elizabeth hastens home. Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Bennet go off to search for Lydia, but Mr. Bennet eventually returns home empty-handed. Just when all hope seems lost, a letter comes from Mr. Gardiner saying that the couple has been found and that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia in exchange for an annual income. The Bennets are convinced that Mr. Gardiner has paid off Wickham, but Elizabeth learns that the source of the money, and of her family’s salvation, was none other than Darcy.

Now married, Wickham and Lydia return to Longbourn briefly, where Mr. Bennet treats them coldly. They then depart for Wickham’s new assignment in the North of England. Shortly thereafter, Bingley returns to Netherfield and resumes his courtship of Jane. Darcy goes to stay with him and pays visits to the Bennets but makes no mention of his desire to marry Elizabeth. Bingley, on the other hand, presses his suit and proposes to Jane, to the delight of everyone but Bingley’s haughty sister. While the family celebrates, Lady Catherine de Bourgh pays a visit to Longbourn. She corners Elizabeth and says that she has heard that Darcy, her nephew, is planning to marry her. Since she considers a Bennet an unsuitable match for a Darcy, Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth promise to refuse him. Elizabeth spiritedly refuses, saying she is not engaged to Darcy, but she will not promise anything against her own happiness. A little later, Elizabeth and Darcy go out walking together and he tells her that his feelings have not altered since the spring. She tenderly accepts his proposal, and both Jane and Elizabeth are married.

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378 “Pride and Prejudice: Plot Overview,” Spark Notes, Spark Notes.
Appendix 6: Example of unedited conversation – Transcript 26

- [general initial discussion about Icarus poems - basic ideas]
Me [...] What are you trying to say that’s true in your poem. [...] First of all, what do you think I’m saying when I say true?
Olivia It’s a deeper meaning than just the words.
Me A deeper meaning than just the words. Ok. So something that’s true is a deeper meaning.
Olivia Not necessarily. But I think that when you’re reading poetry, when you say truth, then it’s more open to interpretation, and everyone’s individual truths.
Me So, is it right to say then that truth can be open to interpretation.
- [several students say yes]
Me Explain how Bella.
Bella Because everybody has their own perception of what is right and wrong, so they can have their own perception of what they think is truthful. Can’t they?
Me I don’t know. I’m not messing around with you here. I’m not sure.
- [no permission]
Olivia Two people can believe whole heartedly in completely different things about the same subject.
- [no permission]
Emily It’s their truth.
Olivia It’s their truth. Yeah.
Me ... Have you ever heard of a word called relativism?
Olivia Yes
Me Relativism is evil. Do you know what it means?
Olivia It’s evil?
Me Yes.
Olivia Ok, maybe I don’t.
Me Relativism basically says ok [student name] you can believe what you want to believe, Bella you can believe what you want to believe, I’m going to believe what I’m going to believe, and we can all just be happy believing our own stuff. Without talking to each other.
- [no permission]
Ava I don’t think so.
Olivia Well no, I don’t think anyone has to be right.
- [no permission]
Olivia They’re right for them though.
- [no permission]
Olivia Yes, I agree.

Ava Is it possible for two things to be true? In different places?
- [no permission]

Me What if we were to look at painting, or look at a poem, The Fall of Icarus, and person A said that poem is a terrible poem, and gave reasons for that, and then person B said that poem’s a great poem-

Bella -but that’s more opinion.

Olivia Well, I think it’s a different kind of truth.

Bella Yes, I can agree with that. But I think what [student] is trying to say is that there are some straight answers for logical things.

Me What would be an example of that?

Bella one plus one is two.
- [no permission]

Olivia The sky’s not blue.
- [no permission]

Ava It can go right down to the way of seeing.

Me So that’s a scientific fact isn’t it. We can probably say to some extent scientific facts can be true.

Olivia But we don’t even know if the sky exists.

Ava And then you can apply that whole question, how do you know I see the same thing as you do.

Olivia These aren’t necessarily shoes, they may not exist.
- [untranscribable chatter about this]

Emily You know the tree that falls.

Me Ah, does a tree make a sound if it falls in the woods.

Emily Of course it does.

Bella No, if no one’s around.

Emily Yes, it makes a sound.
- [untranscribable chatter about this]

Bella Emily, you don’t know because you weren’t there.

Me Ok, very interesting. We’ve got to move on a bit. Ava, you said in your poem we all die alone or something like that. Is that a true thing? And how would we establish the truth of that?

Ava Well [student] may not think it’s true.

Bella we all die-

Olivia -I think it’s a feeling more than a truth.
Ava: You leave this world the same way you come into it. No one's there. It's about facing the soul. It's just you.

Me: So what kind of evidence are you giving then for your truth.

Ava: I need evidence?

Me: Well that sounded like evidence there didn't it? Where you were describing to us why you think it's true that we die alone.

Ava: Oh right.

Me: It's different to scientific evidence isn't it. How would we describe Ava's evidence?

Olivia: Would you call that evidence?

Me: Maybe not. What would you call it? Reasons for believing something?

Olivia: What was the question you asked?

Me: Ava gave some reasons for believing a certain thing. What's the definition of the types of reasons that she's given. For example, the sky is blue because we can use sense data.

Bella: She's proving her beliefs. Sort of.

Me: How.

Bella: By giving evidence like you said. It is evidence if you're trying to prove your belief. Your opinion, or whatever you stated.

Me: Ok.

- [...]

Me: We'll start with you Emily. What are you saying in your poem? What claim are you making?

Emily: That Icarus didn't really do anything wrong. He was unlucky.

Me: He was unlucky. So what general claim about life are you making there then?

Emily: Not that you shouldn't not take risks, but you should be more aware, and think a bit more.

Me: Ok, so you're saying that wasn't thinking very well... he was foolish.

Emily: Yes.

Me: Ok... Olivia. What are you saying in your response?

Olivia: Well, we were talking about that before.

Me: The dying alone stuff?

Olivia: Yes.

Me: Ok.... Bella?

Bella: Mine kind of is evidence itself. The poem that I've written. My first line is 'the memory of others is what we are given'. So what we know about Icarus is what we hear from the other people that were there.

Me: What a great line.
Ava: I was just thinking that.
Me: That's a really nice line.
Bella: So, it's kind of evidence itself, and it's proving to the readers Icarus' story.
Me: Yes. Can you say that line again Bella.
Bella: The memory of others is what we are given.
Me: What is that actually saying about humans, or human existence, or people just being in the world.
Bella: Things are passed on, I guess.
Me: Yes, talk more about that.
Bella: You know. You hear all the stories your grandpa tells you about the world war and all, and that passes on and your mum tells you the story, and it goes, and goes on. My mum always says things about her father. It's kind of like setting an example for others. Because they've had an experience from a peer, who kind of overlooks them.
Me: And in a way you become those stories.
Bella: Yes. I guess.
Me: ... what do other people think?
Olivia: I really like that.
- [ ]
Ava: It could mean a number of things too.
Me: What else could it mean Ava?
Ava: the memory of others is what we are given. I was thinking the memory of others relies on what we remember and what we're told. It could be something completely different but it's still the truth because it's how I feel. I don't know.
Me: Ok. Hard questions aren't they. You haven't actually told us what big thing you're saying in your poem. We all got stuck on that line.
Bella: ... What do you mean big thing. It's pretty self-explanatory.
Me: Is it?
Bella: The last bit says 'although he is gone he is reborn by the people who mourn.' So it's the people who feel for Icarus. We are retelling the story because we feel for Icarus. We feel a need to go over it.
Me: So we're mourning for Icarus. Is that what you're saying?
Bella: Yes.
Me: Us. Actually us.
Bella: Sort of. Yes.
- [ ]
Me: How is your response to Icarus a reflection of your own history and personal situation and where you live in the world...
Emily: Could you give us an example.

Me: Yes. I'll just read out my example. [read from sheet 'Poetry Justification']

Olivia: That makes perfect sense. It just doesn’t quite relate to what you were asking us which was how it reflects on...

Emily: -it relates to us?

- [...]

Me: ...So in your response what is there about you that's in there, that's affected the way you've interpreted the poem.

Ava: Is it how you came to feel how you feel about the poem.

Me: Yes. [more about my interpretation]

- [...]

Bella: Say it one more time.

- [students are generally very confused at this point. Is the potential problem with being 'methodical' about an interpretation? Using prepared questions etc.]

- [I read the question out again]

Bella: It’s not really a response to our history. You can’t really play out your whole life and pick things out, well I guess you could. It’s more...

Me: -why couldn’t you?

Bella: In a poem like this you don’t want to focus on yourself, you want to focus on the subject. The story itself.

Olivia: But how you’ve interpreted it is a consequence of your history.

Bella: I guess. I feel like this poem means to me everything, it needs to be more recognised, Icarus needs to be more recognised. It’s written in that way that he is the focus.

Me: So how is that a reflection of yourself. You don’t have to go deeply psychological here or anything,

Ava: Are you asking where. When. What?

Me: Just like my example, me being a teacher and working with people of your age.

Ava: It just makes me a bit unsure. We’re all just different people. You can’t always pinpoint it to one experience. It’s just how you’re born.

Me: And how you grow up.

Ava: Sometimes you can. You could think, you could do that easily.

Me: You’re absolutely right. So this question is flawed in a sense. Is that what you’re saying?

Ava: Yes.

Olivia: It’s like [the] nature versus nurture we may be getting in to.

Me: Should we leave that question alone. Is it too hard. Not working?
- [several students agree]

Ava  We're not going to answer it now.

Me   Ok... maybe this is the last one. What have you accepted and rejected about modernism and the poem Icarus.

-  [...]

Olivia I used enjambment in my poem because I thought that it was effective in getting the reader to fall into the poem and because it allowed for more of a personalisation of what you were saying.

Me    Meaning? Is that what you mean?

Olivia yes.

Me    It allowed the reader to personalise?

Olivia Yep.

Me    Did other people use enjambment?

-  [several students say yes]

Me    Why did you use it Emily.

Emily Mostly for the same reasons. It reads better with enjambment. You can separate the words how you want. You can change the meaning for different people.

Me    And you think that works better than standard punctuation?

Olivia When I first drafted mine I got my sister to read it out loud to me with enjambment and she didn’t understand it at all. So there’s a bit of an issue. Or there can be anyway. [...]

Me    Enjambment Bella. How come you used it?

Bella The flexibility of it and how it allows the reader to read it the way they want. It kind of paces them instead of rushing through the poem.

Me    Ava, did you use enjambment. Ok, so you rejected enjambment.

Ava   I didn’t really reject it, I just didn’t use it.

Me    Can you think why you didn’t use it?

Ava   I just went ABAB. That’s what came naturally to me.

Bella  yes. I used that as well.

-  [...]

Ava   That’s just what was easiest for me.

Me    So what did you all reject. What did you all say no to. Maybe something about the poem. Was there something about the poem that you didn’t like? Or was there something about the poem that you did like.

Bella  I rejected the complicatedness of it.

Me    Of the poem?

Bella  Yes. I made it really simple for the reader. Instead of having a really deep meaning behind it. Making it clear.

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Me  So you didn’t want to be obscure in a sense.
Bella  Not really. I agree that you can make it really obscure if you wish to, but I think these days poems, they shouldn’t be so complicated because they’re not enjoyable.
Olivia  That’s half the fun.
Bella  But I think the poems should have an underlie, and have a meaning towards it, but I think they should be a little less deep as such.
Me  I don’t think you quite managed to be not deep with those first few lines there Bella but anyhow. Emily, what did you say no to about the poem. [...] 
Emily  I already said I rejected Icarus not being the focus. Are we talking about the deepness?
Me  Talk about whatever you like.
Emily  It’s not like mine’s one of those poems that you never understand what it’s about. I liked how with the Icarus poem you could delve deeper into it find new meanings [inaudible].
me  Olivia?
Olivia  I can’t think of anything I really rejected actually.
Bella  You didn’t focus on what you wanted to put out, you just basically chose what you wanted to include.
Olivia  I included a lot.
Me  That’s interesting Bella, we’ll get back to that in a moment. We’ll finish off with that. What did you include Olivia?
Olivia  I included the structure and a lot of the themes. It’s difficult for me to say whether there’s a deeper meaning in it because I don’t know how other people see it. But I didn’t reject that.
Me  What did you like or not like about it that you worked with Ava?
Ava  …I liked the simplicity. I just liked the message in it.
Me  You liked the message?
Ava  Yes.
-  [...] 
Bella  It’s not really one of those poems that you have to read over I don’t think. I think if you read it carefully you can understand it straight away. Instead of going over it.
Olivia  But when we discussed it I found there was a lot more I didn’t get in the first reading. Other people’s interpretations.
Bella  Yes, that’s always going to be the case with any poem really. Other people’s opinions adding towards it changes your perception of the poem as you go along.
Me  … What of your own beliefs did it make you think about? The poem. What did it draw to the surface?
Me The questions was, what of your own beliefs did the poem draw to the surface or make you think about more. [I give an example]

Emily It reminds me that everyone makes mistakes. Even the father. Most problems don’t come from just one person. They’re a whole bunch of smaller mistakes made by other people.

Me That’s a really interesting one...

Bella Everyone adds towards it because your surrounding is what influences you to do those things. And then the things you do affect everyone else.

Me That’s great. So in a sense you’re saying it was the father’s fault.

Emily I think that he was partially to blame. So was Icarus. He could have got help-

Bella -He could have got help towards making the wings. Maybe. Possibly. Did he know what he was doing?

Me He should know. If you’re going to give a set of wings to a teenage boy, what are they going to do? [...] Can anyone think of an example of that in our contemporary world?

Bella Yes, it is a shame. It’s like how people die in an accident that shouldn’t have happened. We give teenagers this power that they can’t control. They’ll get in a car, next minute they’ll be dead.

Emily That’s what I was thinking too.

Me ...How many times do we hear. Generally young boys. Young men.

Bella My dad’s always like do you want to be a vegetable. You don’t want to be like that. Make sure somebody knows where you’re going and who’s driving.

Me Why is it that we do it then?

Bella It’s an escape. A thrill.

Me But I mean parents. Why do adults?

Emily I think people like to assume the best of their children. Most of the time anyway.

Olivia You can’t confine them too much or they’ll do something worse.

Emily I think that’s probably what most kids in that situation will do. Go off with this random stranger and drive in his car.

Bella They don’t tell the parent there’s an extra person in the car. Or whose driving the car.

Me Olivia, talk more about what you said then. That’s important too I think.

- [...]

Bella you can’t contain them.

Me Why not. Wouldn’t they be better off in a little container?

Bella Children need to be free.
Bella  It's just simple. It's logical. The way you bring up someone, you don't. I'm not saying that's the wrong way to bring up someone, I'm sure someone may play by those rules, but there are those certain people who wouldn't want boundaries.

Olivia  The book we've just been reading [in another class]... is a really good example of that I think.

-  [...]

-  [...]

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Appendix 7: Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by William Carlos Williams

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

---

Appendix 8: Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone by W. H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

---

Appendix 9: A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London by Dylan Thomas

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.381

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04 June, 2008

A/Prof D.G. Beckett
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne

Dear A/Prof Beckett

Project title: Phenomenology for Children
Researchers: A/Prof D. G. Beckett, Mr J Pletzner
Ethics ID: 0711283

I am pleased to advise that the amendment to this Project was approved by the Humanities and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee on 2 June, 2008.

Please note it is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of the amendment.

Yours sincerely

Ms Jacky Angus
Secretary, Humanities and Applied Sciences HESC
Phone: 83442074, Email: jsa@unimelb.edu.au

cc: HEAG Chair - Melbourne Graduate School of Education
Mr J Pletzner, PhD student
Appendix 11: Letter of Approval from The Department of Education and Training

Department of Education & Training
Office of Learning and Teaching

SOS003507

Mr Jason Pietzner

Dear Mr Pietzner

Thank you for your application of 5 March 2007 in which you request permission to conduct a research study in government schools titled: The Role of Phenomenology in Philosophy for Children.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Should your institution’s ethics committee require changes or you decide to make changes, these changes must be submitted to the Department of Education for its consideration before you proceed.

2. You obtain approval for the research to be conducted in each school directly from the principal. Details of your research, copies of this letter of approval and the letter of approval from the relevant ethics committee are to be provided to the principal. The final decision as to whether or not your research can proceed in a school rests with the principal.

3. No student is to participate in this research study unless they are willing to do so and parental permission is received. Sufficient information must be provided to enable parents to make an informed decision and their consent must be obtained in writing.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you should advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director.

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000
DX 216983

GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

Victoria
The Place To Be
5. Any extensions or variations to the research proposal, additional research involving use of the data collected, or publication of the data beyond that normally associated with academic studies will require a further research approval submission.

6. At the conclusion of your study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Research and Development Branch, Department of Education, Level 2, 33 St Andrews Place, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne, 3001.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Chris Warne, Project Officer, Research and Development Branch, by phone on (03) 9637 2272 or by email at

Yours sincerely

\[\text{signature}\]

2/2007

cnc
Appendix 12: Letter of Approval from the School

To the University of Melbourne’s Human Research Ethics Committee,

I have read and understood the details of Jason Pietzner’s research proposal entitled ‘Phenomenology for Children’ and I have also sighted the Department of Education and Training’s ‘Permission to Conduct Research in Schools’ approval letter.

I therefore give permission for Jason to conduct this research at [Redacted]

Regards,

[Redacted]

Principal
Appendix 13: Permission Form and Plain Language Statement for parents and students

Philosophy for Children

Hello students and parents,

My name is Jason Pietzner and I am a post-graduate student at The University of Melbourne. The Victorian government has recently introduced some changes to the curriculum (what must be taught in schools). One of the changes is that 'thinking' must now be taught and this is the part that my project is based on. I want to find out how students your age can think philosophically and how I can make these classes more interesting for you. When I finish my project it will be part of my degree, called a "Ph.D". For this I have to write a thesis, which is similar to a short book, in which I report on the work I have done with you. My teacher, Associate Professor David Beckett, helps me with my project. He is called my "supervisor". We both work in the Faculty of Education.

Tim, your school principal, has given me permission to give you this letter and tell you about my project. Once you have read the letter you can decide if you would like to take part. You should talk to your parents about the project too.

If you want to be part of the project, you will not have to do any extra work during or outside your normal classes. The work you do in classes, if you choose to take part, will be collected by me and I will write about it as part of my thesis. I will audio record some of the group conversations we have in class. If you do not want to take part, I will not audio record anything you say. I will also take photographs of the classes and activities we do and make notes. Once again, if you do not want to take part, I will not photograph you. I will ask you to fill in a short questionnaire every three weeks which you only have to do if you choose to take part.

The permission I am seeking asks to use your work and conversations as part of my project. I will also use the photographs to help describe what happens in classes. Only my supervisor and I will see your work, hear your conversations and see the photos. They will be written about in my thesis but you will be referred to anonymously and you will not be identified in any way. The project will have no effect on your school report or your results on your report. In my thesis you will be completely anonymous as I will be using a pretend name when discussing your work. You can choose your pretend name if you like.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any work you have supplied, you are free to do so. Permission for me to undertake this study has been given to me by the Department of Education and Training and The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee.

After the project is over, I will lock away all the information I have gathered safely in the Department of Education for five years. I have to do this because it is a University rule. After that my supervisor will destroy it. It is possible though for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions.

Remember, you don’t have to take part unless you want to. If you have any questions you should talk to your teacher or a parent. If they don’t know the answer to your question, they can contact me, or my supervisor, or the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739.

If you want to be part of my project, and your parent/s agree, please sign your name on the next page where it says "student", and get your parent or guardian to sign as well. I will then collect and keep the form.

2-Mar-07
Human Research Ethics Committee application #0711283.1
Plain Language Statement Version One

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Faculty of Education

Consent form for persons participating in research projects

PROJECT TITLE: Phenomenology for Children

Name of participant: Jason Pietzner

Name of investigator: Jason Pietzner

1. I consent to participation in the project named above, the particulars of which - including details of audio recordings, photographs, questionnaires and work sample collection - have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher or his assistant to use the audio recordings, photographs, questionnaires and work samples referred to under (1) above.

3. I acknowledge that:

(a) The possible effects and use of the audio recordings, photographs, questionnaires and work sample collections have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

(b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

(c) The project is for the purpose of research;

(d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(e) Some group discussions will audio-taped, and copies of transcripts will be returned to me for verification;

(f) I will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;

(g) Participation or non-participation in the research will have no affect on my results.

Signature __________________________
Date __________________________
(Student)

Signature __________________________
Date __________________________
(Parent/Guardian)

2-Mar-07
Human Research Ethics Committee application #0711283.1
Plain Language Statement Version One
Appendix 14: List of student participants and classes (anonymous)

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Appendix 15: Transcription and work collection dates

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Appendix 16: Musee des Beaux Arts by W. H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

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"Of Mice and Men: Plot Overview." Spark Notes, Spark Notes.


"Pride and Prejudice: Plot Overview." Spark Notes, Spark Notes.


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Author/s:
PIETZNER, JASON

Title:
Expanding their horizons: hermeneutic practices and philosophising with children

Date:
2014

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/41253

File Description:
Expanding their horizons: hermeneutic practices and philosophising with children