

The World of Dialogue

Thinking Through Dialogue: Essays
on Philosophy in Practice
Trevor Curnow, editor
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reviewed by Gilbert Burgh

*T*his volume, edited by Trevor Curnow, contains a selection of proceedings from the 5th International Conference on Philosophy in Practice, held at Wadham College, Oxford, UK. It is an indispensable resource for anyone who has or wants to incorporate «thinking through dialogue» into his or her management, education, or counseling practices.

Unlike previous conferences held by the Society of Consultant Philosophers, a decision was made to broaden the scope of this conference to also include contributions on philosophical inquiry in education and productive dialogue in organisations. The result is a collection of papers that bring together and focus on philosophical counselling, philosophy with children, philosophy in the workplace, and the wider world of dialogue, all with emphasis on the practical dimension.

Each of the papers is gathered together under the area it addresses. A general background and introduction to each area is given by leading exponents in their fields: Tim LeBon, Karen Murris and Joanna Haynes, and Nigel Laurie. Whilst the papers have been ordered under headings, clearly, the aim is to engage the reader in dialogue where overlap is apparent, and to encourage the reader to reflect upon future cross-fertilisation between the different areas. In the editor's words, «All forms of philosophical practice have something to learn from, and offer to, others» (Curnow, p.1).

The first section on Philosophical Counselling is considerably larger and broader, but this is to be expected as the scope of the conference was broadening from its traditional base. Tim LeBon's introduction gives the reader who is unfamiliar with the area a background on the development and scope of philosophical counselling; the theoretical assumptions, methods employed, the nature of philosophical counselling, and the differences between philosophical and psychological counselling, as well as a short case study. From its recent development when Gerd Achenbach opened the first practice in 1981 to the present, LeBon briefly sketches a rich history which includes Socrates, the Stoics and Epicureans, the establishment of psychoanalysis as a non-medical model for personal predicaments, Carl Roger's influence on «counseling», Carl Jung's recognition of the philosophical nature of many a patient's

problem, and the return to Socrates as a way of being «directly involved in helping individuals to think about their lives» (LeBon, p.5).

LeBon's introduction puts into context the papers collected under this section. The papers themselves vary greatly from useful and practical advice for anyone training for or setting up practice, to the nature of philosophical counselling, and whether Socrates himself could be considered a philosophical counsellor. The themes of similarities and differences between philosophical counselling and psychotherapy, and the connection between cognition and emotion are also addressed. Papers on method and techniques, and application from a variety of practitioners from diverse backgrounds gives a fresh insight on how philosophy can be practised in various clinical contexts, including multicultural counselling, counselling with people identified as mildly autistic, and interdisciplinary approaches. We are also reminded that there is more to philosophy than western philosophy.

The next section, Philosophy with Children, and its emphasis on communities of inquiry, demonstrates the application of philosophical inquiry in education. Karen Murriss and Joanne Haynes offer a thoughtful introduction, comparing Philosophy with Children, Socratic Dialogue and Philosophical Counselling. Through an historical background, beginning with Socrates and the ways in which Socratic dialogue has developed, the novice and more seasoned practitioner can gain much insight from these comparisons, especially the distinction between Matthew Lipman's community of inquiry pedagogy (which has its influences in not only Socrates but also in the pragmatist tradition of Charles Saunders Pierce and John Dewey), and the «Socratic Method» based on founder Leonard Nelson's aims to educate children in a love of truth and to encourage self esteem, and the development of the rules of Socratic dialogue developed by Gustav Heckmann. Papers range from looking at a philosophical approach to contemporary art, to the development of thinking through dialogue through a dialogue between the authors themselves, philosophical inquiry in the university classroom, using the dialogical approach with African-American High School students, and the development of philosophy for/with Children in the UK.

Philosophy in the Workplace addresses the view of empowering the world of work through philosophical dialogue. Most commonly, the relevance of philosophy has been limited to codes of conduct or ethics rather than on workplace practices. Indeed, what this section demonstrates is that philosophical insights can inform how we approach work, and therefore, how we conduct ourselves in the workplace.

The introduction by Nigel Laurie gives an overview of the arrival of the consultant philosopher and how philosophy can contribute to the workplace. Papers address issues such as how managers can learn through dialogue, training, leadership and philosophical thinking in health care, the importance of wisdom in leadership, and on becoming hospitable in the hospitality industry.

The Wider World of Dialogue is more general in scope than the other sections but is relevant to all the topics in each of the areas. According to the editor, the aim is «to contribute to a better understanding of Socratic dialogue in particular» (Curnow, p.233). The introduction by Trevor Curnow warns how the term dialogue has become both too vague and too uncritical, and outlines a number of ways in which dialogue can be better understood. The selection of papers include an examination of the nature of monologue and dialogue, the tendency of dialogue to become aggres-

sive with participants defending their positions rather than engaging in cooperative exchange, detecting where actual disagreements lie in order to make easier the direction progress needs to be made, and the role that humour can play in Socratic dialogue.

I recommend this volume to anyone interested in dialogue generally, and in the application of philosophical inquiry to counselling, education and the workplace. However, no book review is complete without a personal note from the reviewer. I am tempted to say that the last three sections could have benefited from a larger selection of papers, but this is indicative of the range of papers submitted rather than a criticism of this volume.

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[*Back to current electronic table of contents*](#)