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# Growing Up with Philosophy Camp

How Learning to Think  
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## Chapter Eight

### The Utah Lyceum

#### *Cultivating "Reasonableness" in Southwest Utah*

Kristopher G. Phillips and Gracia Allen

A cursory Internet search will yield any number of articles, both scholarly and popular, discussing the increasing polarization in America. The problems facing the United States, and indeed the world, are substantial, and there seems to be a notable decrease in people's willingness to listen to, consider, and understand (let alone be moved by) others' considered opinions. The most pressing problems of today are unlikely to be resolved by an unwillingness—or worse, an inability—to consider reasonable ideas that may well challenge one's own. It seems that the world is not suffering from too many thoughtful, respectful, charitable, or otherwise *reasonable* people.

The principal goal of the Utah Lyceum, a pre-college philosophy summer camp housed at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah, is to facilitate the development of what philosopher Michael Pritchard called "reasonableness" in students before they get to college.<sup>1</sup> While one hopes that cultivating a sense of reasonableness in the next generation of students will result in a more honest, thoughtful, and productive marketplace of ideas, the Lyceum seeks to cultivate a sense of reasonableness in participants simply because reasonableness is a valuable outcome in itself.

The first section of this chapter includes a brief history of the Utah Lyceum Program, including how it came to be, what it looks like from day-to-day, and whom the program serves. The second section includes an elaboration on the core idea of reasonableness, the role of dialogue in the Lyceum and in the cultivation of reasonableness in Lyceum participants, and how the Lyceum is designed to help students *do* philosophy, rather than merely *learn about* philosophy as a discipline, with the aim of offering a transformative experience to participants.<sup>2</sup> Section three is focused on the actual impact that the Lyceum program has on participants.

In particular, participants find that the Lyceum bolsters their critical thinking skills and provides an avenue for philosophically curious students to explore ideas they otherwise cannot. This chapter concludes with some general remarks about the Utah Lyceum program, the challenges unique to teaching pre-college philosophy in Southwest Utah, and the value and importance of pre-college philosophical instruction.

## HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE UTAH LYCEUM

The Utah Lyceum is one in a series of loosely affiliated, broadly autonomous, pre-college philosophy outreach programs, including the Iowa Lyceum (housed at the University of Iowa) and the West Michigan Philosophy Lyceum (housed at Western Michigan University).<sup>3</sup> As graduate students at the University of Iowa, Kristopher Phillips and Greg Stoutenberg stumbled across an article on the Illinois Lyceum, founded by Alexis Dyschkan in 2010, and were inspired to co-found the Iowa Lyceum. Phillips brought the Lyceum to Southern Utah University (SUU) in 2014.

By the summer of 2015, Phillips and his colleague in the philosophy program, Kirk Fitzpatrick, had co-founded the Utah Lyceum. The Lyceum program at SUU is financially supported by the Grace A. Tanner Center for Human Values and enjoys substantial support from every level of SUU's administration and marketing department.

Pre-college students face a number of obstacles when furthering their education beyond the standard K–12 classroom, including financial barriers, opportunity costs, and motivation (among others). The Utah Lyceum is designed to minimize the impact of as many of those issues as possible. To that end, the program is entirely free of cost for participants and is a nonresidential camp, running for only half of each day for one week during the summer.

The vast majority of the participants hail from Cedar City or the surrounding communities, though occasionally, students have come from as far as Los Angeles and even Indiana. Those students who join from farther away often take advantage of the half-day structure to explore the substantial offerings at the National Parks nearby. Some of our participants want (or need) to secure summer jobs or participate in summer athletic programs—both important for student development. Because the Lyceum is scheduled for a half-day (allowing participants to secure or hold jobs) and because it is free, participants do not face the difficult choice between furthering their educational development and their social, physical, or financial well-being.

Participants are provided with lunch each day, as well as copies of philosophical texts under discussion during the program. While these provided

texts serve as the core of the Lyceum program, the focus is not necessarily on mastering specific content; rather than ask students to repeat the arguments found therein, these texts serve as a springboard for discussion. Faculty facilitators, as a result, do not lecture. Instead, the faculty (and occasional undergraduate student instructors) serve as discussion leaders<sup>4</sup>—helping participants come to reasoned positions about complex philosophical topics through ongoing, relatively free-form dialogue—this fulfills the goal of the Lyceum to motivate students to *do* philosophy rather than merely learn *about* philosophy.

In addition to the philosophical texts, participants are provided with brief instruction in both formal and informal logic each day. The day kicks off with a discussion of formal logic—how to identify, reconstruct, and evaluate arguments.<sup>5</sup> Participants gain experience applying their logic skills to the texts, as the next two sessions (one before and one after lunch) are focused on passages from the provided philosophical texts. Each day concludes with a discussion of a cluster of informal fallacies. The study of logic has proven to be a surprisingly popular aspect of the Lyceum, with participants remarking that they are encouraged by the idea that there are relatively simple, concrete rules governing the evaluation of reasons.

Between sessions and during lunch, faculty facilitators help participants identify topics or general ideas to explore on their own, often providing articles, books, or further discussions on those topics. On the final day, participants present the fruits of their research and thought. Any area of philosophical discussion is open to the participants, and every year they treat a wide variety of subjects.

Some participants have presented on the nature of human rights, the scope of human knowledge, the Gettier problem, the nature of time, and the demarcation between science and pseudoscience. The Lyceum encourages the participants' families to attend on the final day to see what the students have been thinking about, though often, participants request that the number of adults present at any given time is limited. The depth and clarity of the students' thoughts after merely four days of philosophical instruction are truly inspiring.

## REASONABLENESS, DIALOGUE, AND THE IDEAS BEHIND THE LYCEUM

Before turning to the Lyceum's impact on participants, it would be prudent to touch briefly on the underlying motivational principles of the Lyceum. As mentioned above, the Lyceum is focused on cultivating a sense of "reasonableness" in students. Programs like the Lyceum are poised to introduce, reinforce, and

bolster critical thinking skills in students in ways that traditional pre-college instruction is not.

While that is an incredibly important and valuable outcome, the Lyceum is more than merely a “critical thinking” program. In many high schools, “critical thinking” is understood as synonymous with “problem-solving,” but as Pritchard notes, “problem-solving does not always involve critical thinking, and the exercise of imagination sometimes creates more problems than it solves, thus opening the door to new avenues of inquiry” (Pritchard, 1996, 57). Building on Pritchard’s observation, the Lyceum focuses on facilitating semi-structured dialogue.

Very often, when people engage in dialogue with one another, they are compelled to reflect, to concentrate, to consider alternatives, to listen closely, to give careful attention to definitions and meanings, to recognize unthought of options, and in general to perform a vast number of mental activities that they might not have engaged in had the conversation never occurred (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, 1980, 22).

Understood in this way, *philosophical* dialogue is less focused on finding solutions than it is on expanding the scope of what is possible, and it is here that critical thinking really occurs.

Early in the Lyceum program, faculty facilitators directly discuss the ways that dialogue occurs (e.g., face-to-face, from one philosophical text to another, and within a text), the value of dialogue in terms of intellectual development, and the way that dialogue cultivates reasonableness.<sup>6</sup> To be reasonable, one must (a) understand and be responsive to the positions of others, (b) be prepared to be influenced by having come to an understanding about others’ positions, and (c) remain open to revising or even abandoning their own position in light of the discussion.<sup>7</sup>

Reasonableness is a natural consequence of the sort of dialogue Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick Oscanyan mention, and it is the cornerstone of a philosophical mindset. Presuming that Pritchard is right about the relationship between critical thinking and problem-solving, it is clear that philosophical dialogue lends itself to a more genuine form of critical thinking—one that allows participants in the dialogue to challenge the obvious, to consider ideas that otherwise seem implausible, and to create new problems, thereby expanding the scope of the discussion. High school curricula are not well suited to facilitate this form of critical thinking, but the Utah Lyceum is designed to allow participants the freedom to digress, explore, and discuss issues as they please.

Faculty facilitators make clear to the participants that when it comes to philosophical topics, there really are no experts (i.e., understood as someone

who has “the answers”). While faculty have more familiarity with how to approach philosophical texts and discussions, nobody is in a privileged position with regard to the truth. It is perhaps here that the Lyceum departs most from traditional K–12 education. At the end of the day, there is specific content knowledge that middle and high school students are supposed to have mastered, and teachers are expected to be the arbiters of knowledge; this is simply not the case with the Lyceum.

In many ways, the content and the texts that ground the discussions are incidental to the Lyceum program. The particular texts are selected on the grounds that at least one is a dialogue (to help participants identify argumentative strategies and to model philosophical dialogue), and between them, they cover the core areas of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy. The specific topics, texts, and discussions are largely open-ended; the very structure of the Lyceum itself mirrors the idea of reasonableness it seeks to cultivate in its participants. That is, the structure of the Lyceum is open to revision should the discussion illustrate there is a better way.

## THE IMPACT THE LYCEUM HAS ON PARTICIPANTS

While rural Utah is unique in a number of respects, one way in which Cedar City resembles much of the rest of the country is in the prevailing attitude its citizens have toward philosophy. Broadly speaking, few people in rural Utah know what philosophy is, and what they may have heard of it is likely not complimentary.

A number of public figures, including Neil deGrasse Tyson, Marco Rubio, Stephen Hawking, Bill Nye, and former President Barack Obama have publicly derided the value of philosophy as a discipline (although Rubio and Nye, to their credit, did recant their claims upon being presented with further evidence—a nice example of reasonableness in action!). Middle and high school students in southwest Utah are, somewhat unsurprisingly, encouraged to pursue more “practical” disciplines, perhaps only hearing the term “philosophy” as the punchline of a joke.

While there is a general push for more “critical thinking” in K–12 curricula, arguably due to the idea that science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are the kinds of disciplines that are both vocationally practical and encourage critical thinking, Lyceum participants report that, in practice, traditional K–12 curricula offer few opportunities to pursue the sort of open-ended discussion that facilitates the kind of critical thinking found in the Lyceum.

Even the most curious and ambitious students in high school science courses find themselves shut down when they try to pursue the open-ended, problem-creating dialogue that philosophy encourages. As noted previously, often, K–12 teachers are somewhat hamstrung by the content knowledge they are tasked with imparting in their students. As a result, philosophically curious students are often discouraged from really pursuing ideas beyond what is already accepted as fact. This gives students the impression that to think critically about a subject, one must already have mastered the discipline. Such a notion, of course, is not strictly true, and it has the negative consequence of constructing barriers to critical, creative, and imaginative thinking.

The Lyceum brings those barriers down from the first moment students come to the program. Faculty facilitators encourage participants to challenge them on any topic—to have a genuine dialogue, facilitators and participants must be on roughly the same level. This is one of the ways in which the Lyceum supplements traditional education—participants are invited to discuss core problems in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political theory without antecedent familiarity with the subject matter.

Relying on open discussion, paired with the brief primers in logic, students are well equipped to work through foundational philosophical issues. The pedagogical message to the students is Cartesian in nature; participants are encouraged to think carefully about what they already believe and to rely on their own reasoning to clear away the mess of often conflicting information they receive from the myriad voices surrounding them.<sup>8</sup> Learning to cut out the noise and find one's own voice is tricky, but it is a natural outcome of the Lyceum program precisely because of the open-ended discussion's participants are able to have.

A particularly effective exercise occurs surrounding lunch. On the first day, participants are typically provided with either pizza or a party-style submarine sandwich. While eating, participants are encouraged to pursue the question, "What is a pizza/sandwich?" This seemingly innocuous question immediately illustrates a number of important lessons in philosophy.

Not unlike the development of Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue, participants often begin with applied answers: "This [gesturing to the food in their hand] is a pizza," they might say. That is, of course, correct, but not really what the question is asking, and almost immediately, another student notes this; rather, the question is, "What is it that makes something a pizza?" Lunch immediately explodes into an organic conceptual analysis discussion, complete with examples, counterexamples, lists of purportedly individually necessary conditions, and often hilarious conclusions (e.g., at one point, a participant insisted that tomato soup is a form of pizza, while another insisted that pizzas are just "incomplete" or open-faced sandwiches).

Always a highlight of the program, the pizza/sandwich debate serves a number of functions. While philosophy itself is often unfamiliar to participants, and the texts, terminology, and questions can seem daunting, asking students to discuss something as benign and "obvious" as what a pizza is brings the skills, questions, and problems to a familiar place. That there can be so much *reasonable* disagreement about something so obvious drives home the idea that one's knowledge of the nature of reality is decidedly less settled than it seems.

If it is challenging to provide a reasonable analysis of a pizza, the difficulty in, and importance of, finding a satisfactory analysis of concepts such as "freedom" or "justice" becomes clearer. The discussion also helps participants see the value in being especially clear and careful in posing questions and in presenting positions. The pizza debate serves as a microcosm of the Lyceum. The simple debate forces students to grapple with possibilities that initially seem outlandish; many counterexamples participants generate are perfectly philosophical in the sense that they are wildly unlikely to be the sort of food item anybody would actually make, but they do fit the proposed definitions. Participants are, at once, rigorously critical and wildly imaginative.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bertrand Russell said philosophical contemplation, in its widest scope, does not divide the universe into hostile camps but facilitates dispassionate, thoughtful, open dialogue about the way the world is and the way it *might* be (Russell, 2007 [1912]). A philosophical discussion should be liberating from the narrowly prescribed ideas of a specific cultural, historical, or social context by considering, examining, and responding to those ideas.

Despite the liberating nature of philosophical contemplation, pursued through genuine dialogue, philosophy as a discipline remains a fringe subject that some college students are aware of only because they have to fulfill a breadth requirement (and many are even graduated with a bachelor's degree without any tincture of philosophy). Given the positive impact the Lyceum has on students in rural Utah, it is clear that holding off on philosophical instruction until college is a mistake. There are, however, substantial challenges that face programs such as the Utah Lyceum.

In addition to financial and opportunity cost barriers, a substantial challenge to prospective philosophy students is that the field (and academia generally) tends to fail to be representative of broader demographic trends in the country. Specifically, philosophy as an academic discipline comprises primarily well-to-do white men. Following the recommendations in the

American Philosophical Association Task Force on Inclusion and Diversity 2014 Report,<sup>9</sup> a goal of the Utah Lyceum is to promote inclusion and diversity at the pre-college level with the end of bringing philosophy to students who do not often see themselves represented in the field.

The demographics of the Utah Lyceum largely mirror the demographics of the surrounding area; Cedar City is roughly 90 percent white (non-Hispanic), and somewhere around 70 percent of the population are members of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) faith (more colloquially known as “Mormons”). The program has been effective in recruiting young women at a rate equal to or slightly exceeding young men, with only a handful of Latinx and black students attending. Perhaps the greatest impact the Utah Lyceum can have in terms of demographic changes to the field is by bringing philosophy to more women and less economically advantaged students.

One of the greatest challenges is, perhaps ironically, the very reason that pre-college philosophy programs are so important. Most participants, and the general public in southern Utah, have no idea what philosophy is or why anyone would bother to study it. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to drum up the excitement needed to convince thirteen-to-eighteen-year-old young adults to sacrifice a week of their summer to *study* something they know nothing about.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps exacerbating this challenge is that philosophy, when people know of it, is widely misunderstood. It is seen as impractical, frivolous, or even dangerous. While philosophy *can* be dangerous (and, to be sure, *doing* philosophy did prove dangerous to Socrates, among others), it need not be.

The idea that philosophy is dangerous may be linked to the largely religious make-up of Cedar City. While philosophy and religion have a long and rich history together, there is still a widespread misconception that one cannot be both faithful and a philosopher. This is perhaps more pronounced among members of the LDS faith. While not necessarily codified explicitly in the religion, much of the LDS epistemology is *fideistic*<sup>11</sup> in nature. Roughly put, fideism is the view that knowledge acquired by faith is superior to or outstrips knowledge acquired by reason; in cases where faith and reason conflict, faith-based beliefs are to be accepted over reason-based beliefs.

It is not difficult to understand why philosophy as a discipline may seem at odds with a fideistic epistemology—or at least could furnish adolescents with an avenue that challenges a core aspect of their still-forming identity. Despite the seeming tension between faith and reason, participants find that thinking carefully about philosophical questions does not necessarily undercut their already held beliefs, and in some cases, it can even strengthen the reasons they have for what they believe.

Despite these challenges, the Lyceum continues to grow. That growth is particularly important because the whole of the Utah Lyceum is built on the notion of reasonableness. Programs such as the Lyceum are uniquely positioned to cultivate that reasonableness as a character trait in students. Traditional K–12 education, as it is today, is simply not structured to facilitate the kind of uninhibited exploration that ultimately results in the broader sense of critical thinking, dialogue, and understanding explored in this chapter. Programs like the Lyceum are uniquely positioned to bolster and supplement traditional pre-college education and to inspire students to pursue the intellectual liberation that philosophy is uniquely suited to supply.

## NOTES

1. See Pritchard, 1996, 3; and Phillips, 2019, 45–46.
2. See Mohr Lone, 2012, 12; and Burroughs, 2013, 186.
3. Facilitators at the Iowa Lyceum have contributed a chapter that will appear in the companion to this book—a handbook for philosophy camps for youth, to be published with Rowman and Littlefield.
4. The primary instructors for the Lyceum program are the philosophy faculty at Southern Utah University—Dr. Kirk Fitzpatrick and Dr. Kristopher Phillips (and having joined the faculty in the fall of 2019, Dr. Gretchen Ellefson). While the philosophy faculty handle the majority of the instruction, advanced undergraduate students from the philosophy program are encouraged to join the Lyceum and get some experience in teaching both the formal and informal logic portions of the program. Undergraduate instructors have also developed philosophy games to play with the Lyceum participants in the morning—sometimes a modified prisoner’s dilemma, sometimes a *Jeopardy!*-style quiz game, and many others.
5. The Lyceum follows Susan Haack’s 1978 suggestion that we reframe the discussion of arguments in terms of the epistemology of the argument rather than the metaphysics of the argument. That is, rather than focusing on whether an argument *is* deductive or nondeductive, we consider the *evaluation* of arguments in terms of more (e.g., deductive) or less (e.g., nondeductive) stringent standards to which the argument is held. See Haack, 1978, 12; and Phillips, 2019, 53–54.
6. See Phillips, 2019, for a full discussion of the “levels” at which dialogue occurs.
7. See Pritchard, 1996, 5–7.
8. See Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method*, 1985 (1637).
9. Anderson, et al., 2014.
10. Despite the challenges the Lyceum faces, enrollment is relatively steady. Typically, the Lyceum sees anywhere from fifteen to twenty participants enroll each year.
11. The definition of fideism is still a matter of philosophical dispute. The view, however, is often associated with Pascal, Kierkegaard, and James.

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## Chapter Nine

Philosophy Camp  
and Self-Confidence

Amelia Kahn

When participants in Corrupt the Youth (CTY) Summer Philosophy Program, a two-week residential philosophy summer camp, held on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin,<sup>1</sup> discuss their experience in conversation and in post-camp surveys, one common theme recurs: They left camp with more self-confidence than they had when they arrived.

While self-confidence may seem like an encouraging but incidental side effect of improving writing and reasoning skills, the self-confidence the campers develop is not just a nice feeling. Beliefs about ourselves—about how good our work is, how valuable our ideas are, how likely we are to accomplish our goals—have implications for what it is rational for us to do, to plan to do, and even to aspire to do.

The first part of this chapter will explore the ways in which these beliefs, or self-evaluations, can constrain which actions are rational, and perhaps what one can intend, plan, or aspire to do. For young people, like the CTY campers, these self-evaluations often rely to a great extent on self-confidence, which comprises their general attitude toward themselves and their abilities. An increase in self-confidence, then, can make it not only possible but also rational to set their sights higher than they might have. The second part of the chapter will examine campers' reports of their experience at camp in order to help explain how CTY and other philosophy camps contribute to this increase in campers' self-confidence.

SELF-EVALUATIONS, SELF-CONFIDENCE,  
AND RATIONAL ACTION

To see how self-evaluations can constrain which actions are rational, consider two extremely similar graduate students, Cecilia and Daniel. Cecilia and